

THE SOIL OF SALVATION: AFRICAN AGRICULTURE AND AMERICAN
METHODISM IN COLONIAL ZIMBABWE, 1939-1962

By

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ABBREVIATIONS

AMEC	American Methodist Episcopal Church
ANC	Assistant Native Commissioner
BSAC	British South Africa Company
CNC	Chief Native Commissioner
DFM	Division of Foreign Missions
DNA	Department of Native Agriculture
GPSR	Government Publications relating to Southern Rhodesia
LAA	Land Apportionment Act
LDO	Land Development Officer
LMS	London Missionary Society
NAD	Native Affairs Department
NAZ	National Archives of Zimbabwe
NC	Native Commissioner
NED	Native Education Department
NLHA	Native Land Husbandry Act
NPA	Native Purchase Area
NRB	Natural Resources Board
OMA	Old Mutare Archives
PNC	Provincial Native Commissioner
RAC	Rhodesia Annual Conference of the Methodist Church
SNA	Secretary for Native Affairs
UMCA	United Methodist Church Archives
WDCS	Women's Division of Christian Service

TERMINOLOGY

During the period under study, the Methodist Episcopal Church changed in structure several times, becoming part of the Methodist Church in 1939 and later the United Methodist Church in 1968. However, most of the literature on Zimbabwe simply refers to this denomination as the *American* Methodist Episcopal Church to more easily distinguish the MEC from other Methodist organizations in the country. Therefore, the use of AMEC in this dissertation continues within an existing pattern, but should not be confused with the *African* Methodist Episcopal Church (A.M.E.C.).

The spelling or names of many places changed following the end of minority rule in 1980. The list below covers those appearing in the text. Since this study covers the period from 1939-1962, the official names utilized during that period appear consistently to avoid confusion. Old Umtali mission is now called Old Mutare mission and this is reflected in those citations referring to its current archival holdings.

Pre-1980	Post-1980
Chipinga	Chipinga
Inyanga	Nyanga
Inyazura	Nyazura
Marandellas	Marondera
Melsetter	Chimanimani
Mrewa	Murehwa
Msengezi	Musengezi
Mtoko	Mutoko
Nyadiri	Nyadire
Rusapi	Rusape
Salisbury	Harare
Umtali	Mutare

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This work explores the relationship between religious identity and economic behavior by examining American missionary ‘agricultural evangelism’ alongside the adaptive agricultural strategies created by Zimbabwean farmers between 1939-1962. It explores the assumptions that shaped missionary activity in colonial Zimbabwe, as well as missionary impressions of agriculture in African communities. The period under study also covers the expansion of state intervention in rural areas as African agricultural methods became a source of official concern. Government officials and missionaries alike identified agriculture as the material and ritual core of most African societies. Despite their similar approaches, however, each had distinct motivations and goals for a transformation of African farming practices. Methodist Episcopal Church missionaries placed agricultural improvement at the center of their long term evangelical and educational plans. For

state officials, more intensive farming would allow for the continued resettlement of Africans into legally demarcated reserves.

Just as converts actively created their own forms of Christianity, farmers adapted or appropriated the new manners of agriculture which suited their capabilities and needs. Mission education and extension programs therefore remained only one factor shaping these farmers' economic choices. Likewise, their *ethos* of commercial production did not simply emerge whole or intact from within a new religious identity. The larger realities of the colonial experience in Zimbabwe, particularly segregationist land tenure and marketing policies, would affect every farmer's options and choices. Agricultural change occurred as the result of individual encounters with often tremendous structural forces, becoming a product of both material and cultural factors. This project utilizes mission and government documents, newspapers, missionary accounts and personal papers, as well as oral testimonies collected by the author.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: MISSIONS AND AGRICULTURAL EVANGELISM IN COLONIAL ZIMBABWE

Ha' penny bread and soup, sir, is meat an' drink for heaven's military coup; a starving belly doesn't listen to explanations.¹

Christian missionaries to Southern Africa in the 19th century constructed several discrete evangelisms within their broader conversion projects. The most influential of these multiple messages addressed those aspects of African production and reproduction controlled by local ritual authority. For instance, newly introduced medical techniques, regardless of their relative effectiveness, confronted established ways of understanding health and healing. Similarly, missionary promotion of new farming practices inevitably challenged the existing spiritual landscape by insisting that ‘rationalized’ individual labor could overcome powerful natural forces. In the 20th century, specific elements of this ‘agricultural evangelism’ frequently mirrored the more secular efforts of colonial authorities to control economic differentiation and natural resource use in rural communities.² Both missionaries and government policymakers in colonial Zimbabwe consciously identified agriculture as an important avenue in establishing broader paradigms of

¹ D. Marechera, Scrapiron Blues (Harare: Baobab, 1994) 27.

² The term ‘agricultural evangelism’ is adapted from Paul Landau, “Explaining Surgical Evangelism in Colonial Southern Africa: Teeth, Pain and Faith.” Journal of African History 37, 2 (1996) 261-283.

explanation. African farming routines thus became a site of competing efforts to control both the material and semantic practices of colonized peoples.³

In recognizing the close association between religion and indigenous farming practices, most missionaries were convinced of agriculture's potential as a powerful agent for social transformation. Farming thus became an arena for contesting religious idioms, "one in which superiority in the interpretation of environmental processes became a symbol or a test of the superiority or truth of the Christian religion."⁴ Both church and state sought to remodel rural society along lines determined by distinct institutional motivations. Each viewed agriculture as a double-edged blade that could excise the obstacles which either indigenous religious idioms or resource management strategies placed in their paths. Mission authorities hoped their farm programs would create fertile ground for the expansion of communities transformed by a Christian prosperity. State officials desired the stabilization of African populations without threatening a system of race-based land allocation.

While various missionary bodies included agriculture in their overall program, the American Methodist Episcopal Church (AMEC) mission system exuded a particularly well-articulated activism. These missionaries promoted social change and held their own vision of an African future. Many hoped religious conversion would inspire a corresponding transformation of agricultural practices.

³ J.L. Comaroff and J. Comaroff, Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); P. Richards, "Ecological Change and the Politics of African Land Use," African Studies Review 26 (1983) 1-72.

⁴ R. Grove, "Scottish Missionaries, Evangelical Discourses and the Origins of Conservation Thinking in Southern Africa 1820-1900," Journal of Southern African Studies 15 (1989) 168.

AMEC mission programs attempted to provide clear alternatives to established farming routines and structures of community resource management in order to promote “abundant living with Christian motivations.” In addition, a successful system of farms served to strengthen mission access rights to land and water in the face of local pressures from both indigenous and settler farming communities.

By 1939, AMEC missionaries’ outlook on African agriculture, like that of many state officials, had turned towards the problems of natural resource conservation. The long presence of this topic in government and mission discourse across Eastern/Southern Africa had been substantially amplified by the Dust Bowl that devastated United States agriculture.⁵ Like their London Missionary Society (LMS) counterparts in South Africa a century earlier, American missionaries in colonial Zimbabwe also tended to utilize a particular rural mythology as an “all-purpose metaphor.”⁶ However, rather than a simplistic nostalgia for the vanished Jeffersonian yeomanry, AMEC discourse on agriculture reverberated with the concerns produced by several decades of progressive critique of American society. The ill effects of unfettered industrialization and unplanned urbanization so carefully documented by the “muckrakers” in popular literature found an unintended place within the missionary critique of the colonial economy. According to AMEC missionary characterizations, a degenerating Zimbabwean rural economy originated

⁵ D. Anderson, “Depression, Dustbowl, Demography, and Drought: the Colonial State and Soil Conservation in East Africa during the 1930’s,” *African Affairs* 83 (1984) 321-43.

⁶ J.L. Comaroff and J. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: the Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997) 121.

from the social erosion left by the increasingly broad flow of urban and labor migration.⁷

AMEC missionaries became even more staid than their LMS predecessors in the belief that only complete irrationality or ignorance could explain the continued dependence of the agricultural cycle on chiefly and community rituals. Faith in rational individualism had only intensified amidst the pervasive concern with efficiency and productivity which, by the end of the 1920s, had permeated even rural and smalltown American culture. Therefore, ‘rational’ and ‘progressive’ agriculture continued to represent these missionaries’ best opportunity to counter superstition, that which John Phillip a century previous had called “confused ideas of invisible agency.”⁸ The agrarian disaster of the 1930s that shook the modernized U.S. farming sector only further convinced AMEC missionaries that small-scale agriculture was the key to regenerating rural society in colonial Zimbabwe.

By 1939, the Rhodesian state had also begun escalating its direct efforts to transform African agriculture and thereby maintain a segregated system of land distribution. The published report of the Natural Resources Commission and eventual passage of the Natural Resources Act in 1941 marked a significant transition in the colonial state’s overall approach to agricultural and conservation policy. Under this legislation, a Natural Resources Board (NRB) was appointed to publicize conservation issues and direct attention to any natural resource management issues. The NRB could also investigate conservation problems and

⁷ Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, vol. 2, 125.

⁸ Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, vol. 2, 129.

propose solutions to landholders.⁹ Notably, upon failure to comply the Board could order individuals to undertake appropriate measures. Thereafter, the state increasingly based its hopes for agrarian transformation on a foundation of enforcement rather than extension. Deepening state intervention efforts prompted new forms of accommodation and resistance from African farmers who faced changing patterns of opportunity or constraint.

Struggles over agricultural methods and conservation practices achieved new levels of intensity. Crop selection, tillage routines, field management strategies, and irrigation schemes all became sites of a broader contest to gain control of the processes by which people defined their everyday existence. In this atmosphere, farmers, missionaries, and government officials all sought to assert their own forms of agricultural knowledge. The new state policies emerged as part of a long-term colonial trend towards ‘ecological managerialism’ in which “African rural progress was understood primarily as a technical question. . . .”¹⁰ Yet despite the changes towards a more coercive outlook, expanded government conservation programs could not ensure the continued viability of agriculture in the most crowded African reserves. Various government departments often operated independently of one another despite consistent complaints of under-staffing. More important than any lack of personnel, rising population pressure, fragmentation of landholdings, and public resistance each made the Natural Resources Act difficult to enforce.¹¹

⁹ T.P.Z. Mpofu, “History of Soil Conservation in Zimbabwe,” History of Soil Conservation in the SADCC Region (Maseru: SADCC, 1987) 4.

¹⁰ W. Munro, The Moral Economy of the State: Conservation, Community Development and State Making in Zimbabwe (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1998) 59.

¹¹ Mpofu 5.

The official perceptions of impending disaster in the reserves continued, taking on a new character in the years following the Second World War. Government efforts to find land for new groups of settlers combined with a boom in tobacco prices to create another land squeeze which placed even more pressure upon the fixed resources of reserve lands. Not only did declining yields threaten further white settlement within the segregated system created by the Land Apportionment Act of 1930, but also future external markets based on cash crops and secondary industry. The Chief Native Commissioner (CNC) expressed his growing concern in 1947, some twenty years after the initiation of state-sponsored agricultural demonstration programs:

The fact, however, remains that the vast majority of Native peasant farmers still continue to scratch the soil. In a drought year this type does not even produce sufficient food for its own survival and becomes a parasite on the remainder of the population...and without some form of compulsion in proper farming methods he is unlikely to subscribe to any great extent to the economy of the Colony in the export market.¹²

Believing that the Natural Resources Act had remained ineffective through its lack of scope and direction, state policymakers increasingly sought the path to better land husbandry through more enforceable standards of agriculture and resource management.

With its passage in 1951, the Native Land Husbandry Act (NLHA) became the next legislative response to these conditions. The NLHA attempted to address production and conservation problems in the reserves from several directions. According to the CNC's announcement, the new laws did more than "make good

¹² GPSR: Annual Report of the Secretary for Native Affairs and the Chief Native Commissioner (1947) 9.

husbandry methods compulsory and control stock and grazing; it gives power to give individual farming rights which can devolve to an heir, and so make the right-holder more land conscious; the power for provision of labour to ensure soil conservation in the communal grazing areas. . . .”¹³ The NLHA contained powers to enforce a “reasonable standard” of land husbandry and affirm African responsibility for resource protection. Various mechanical and biological soil conservation practices became mandatory. Under this act, earlier destocking practices also broadened significantly. By legally limiting cattle holdings, the NLHA attempted to relate stockholdings to arable land holdings in order to control farming practices. Restricted grazing programs would bring areas to their carrying capacities. Further destocking, along with the reallocation of land, presented African farmers with a disturbing contradiction. Cattle and land were both taken away while many rural inhabitants spent increasing amounts of time working on compulsory conservation measures. As Michael Drinkwater concludes, state policies appeared to promote simultaneous impoverishment and development in the reserves. Consequently, “to the rural peoples the white community was a concentration of irrationality.”¹⁴

The government had hoped to create conservation incentives for individuals by providing security of tenure on arable land and guaranteeing grazing rights on communal lands. With a further division of land into specified ‘standard’ areas, the policy attempted to control the number of peasant cultivators on the land and thereby

¹³ GPSR: Annual Report of the Secretary for Native Affairs and the Chief Native Commissioner (1951) 4.

¹⁴ M. Drinkwater, “Technical Development and Peasant Impoverishment: Land Use Policy in Zimbabwe’s Midlands Province,” Journal of Southern African Studies 15, 2 (1989) 295.

preventing future increases in population pressure.¹⁵ Rainfall regimes determined the size of standard areas. In a continuation of earlier state land policies, this took no account of the micro-ecologies which certainly affected pre-existing African approaches to land utilization. Government land use planners similarly paid no attention to the “sacred ridges, trees, and propitiation sites” that made up an established spiritual landscape directly connected to these varied ecosystems.¹⁶ Furthermore, this policy denied urban workers any land in the reserves, with those males absent at implementation having to choose between industrial or agricultural futures. Migrant labor would end, permanently splitting the African population between rural and urban locations.¹⁷ The various components of this comprehensive effort to re-engineer African society in colonial Zimbabwe produced so much rural and urban opposition that the state abandoned implementation of the plan prematurely in 1962.

While scholars have often examined the emergent tensions between state and peasant agendas which colonial rural ‘improvement’ policies produced, a nuanced understanding of this period requires the inclusion of missions and their adherents as active participants in local agricultural development. Accounts and analysis of agrarian change must move beyond the usual cursory portrayal of early missionaries who introduced Africans to modern farming methods. It is likewise crucial not to overstate the activities of the missionaries themselves at the expense of African

¹⁵ W. Duggan, “The Native Land Husbandry Act of 1951 and the Rural African Middle Class in Southern Rhodesia,” *African Affairs* 79 (1980) 231-32. See also V. Machingaidze, “Agrarian Change from Above: the Southern Rhodesia Native Land Husbandry Act and African Response.” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 24 (1991) 557-88.

¹⁶ Munro 60-62.

¹⁷ Duggan. 229-31.

agency. As with so many other aspects of mission Christianity, converts appropriated and adapted the missionary messages concerning “proper” agricultural practices.¹⁸ Meaningful agricultural innovation also took place without the motivations of mission Christianity. But an extended mission presence frequently influenced the form and direction of these changes.¹⁹

Despite recognition by missionaries themselves of the centrality of agriculture in African societies, historical studies of missionary endeavors in Africa have tended to focus narrowly on the relationship between Christianity and the extension of colonial rule. Much of the literature initially produced considers missionary relations with the colonial administration and the impact of their activities on African society in the early contact period. These analyses dealt primarily with the political and economic factors of expansion, frequently neglecting the religious and cultural significance of missionary messages.²⁰ Such emphases reflect the common perception of missionaries within nationalist historiography. As Beidelman stated early on, most studies had considered Christianity in Africa “mainly in terms of the relations of the convert to his traditional society, to the process of social change, or sometimes to the development of native separatist churches. . . it never included the missionaries who had made the

¹⁸ H. Bredekamp and R. Ross, “The Naturalization of Christianity in South Africa,” eds. H. Bredekamp and R. Ross. Missions and Christianity in South African History (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1995) 4.

¹⁹ T.O. Ranger, “Protestant Missions in Africa: the Dialectic of Conversion in the Methodist Episcopal Church in Eastern Zimbabwe, 1900-1950.” eds. T.D. Blakely, W.E.A. van Beek, and D.L. Thomson. Religion in Africa: Experience and Expression (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1994) 297.

²⁰ On this issue, see T. O. Ranger, “Religious Movements and Politics in Sub-Saharan Africa,” African Studies Review 29, 2 (1986) 1-69.

conversions or described everyday affairs at the mission station. . . .²¹ Subsequent studies, however, did begin to address these very concerns.²²

More specifically, although scholars mentioned the impact of missions on progressive farming, only a few ever moved beyond fragmentary descriptions of the broader relationship between Christianity and agricultural change. In Chenjerai Zvobgo's recent overview of Christian missions in Zimbabwe, agriculture is only one of many important topics examined from 1890-1939. He is more directly concerned with the onset of Christianity and educational impact, so mission farming endeavors receive only scattered attention.²³ Furthermore, historians have seldom treated mission communities as long-term actors in local agricultural development. Many have proposed that missions provided some initial inducement for commercial farming, few study the extended character of most mission endeavors. Robin Palmer's brief agricultural history of Rhodesia had previously argued that the inherent uncertainties of their agricultural economy made Shona farmers quite responsive to new markets that accompanied the arrival of white settlers. He mentions that the VaShawasha people, "helped by the Jesuit fathers of Chishawasha Mission, were able to supply Salisbury with maize. . . and a certain amount of wheat,

²¹ T.O. Beidelman, "Social Theory and the Study of Christian Missions in Africa," *Africa* 44 (1974) 235.

²² For example, see R. Strayer, *The Making of Mission Communities in East Africa: Anglicans and Africans in Colonial Kenya, 1875-1935* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1978); P. Zachrisson, *An African Area in Change, Bezingwe 1894-1946: A Study of Colonialism, Missionary Activity and African Response*. University of Gothenburg: Department of History, 1978); G.Z. Kapenzi, *The Clash of Cultures: Christian Missionaries and the Shona of Rhodesia* (Washington: University Press of America, 1979); H. B. Hansen, *Mission, Church and State in a Colonial Setting: Uganda 1890-1925* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984).

²³ C.J.M. Zvobgo, *A History of Christian Missions in Zimbabwe, 1890-1939* (Harare: Mambo Press, 1996).

barley and grapes.”²⁴ However, his general observation that “mission stations not infrequently acted as a stimulus to agricultural innovation” receives no elaboration and appears only in an endnote.²⁵ Several years later, Colin Bundy discusses similar patterns early in his influential examination of peasants in South Africa. Agriculture held a central importance for LMS missionaries the 19th Century Cape colony as “the championship of fixed settlements, of the sale of farm produce and of the purchase of artificial wants” structured much of their discourse.²⁶ Although often mentioned as the agents who introduced African farmers to cash crops, rotation systems, or new conservation measures, accounts of the missionary role in agricultural matters rarely progress beyond the early colonial period.²⁷

Scholars have more usually sought to connect church influences with the emergence of nationalist organizations. This could expose links between Christianity, agriculture, and politics, as in Mac Dixon-Fyle’s investigation of popular protest on Zambia’s Tonga plateau. He demonstrates how missionary activity could influence farmers’ receptivity to new state agricultural programs. Early mission adherents still farming in the 1940’s refused to join the administration’s improved farming scheme. These farmers felt they had already

²⁴ R. Palmer, “The Agricultural History of Rhodesia.” eds. R. Palmer and N. Parsons. The Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977) 229-30.

²⁵ Palmer, “Agricultural History,” 248.

²⁶ C. Bundy, The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979) 39.

²⁷ O. Kalinga, “The Master Farmers’ Scheme in Nyasaland: a Study of a Failed Attempt to Create a ‘Yeoman’ Class,” African Affairs 92 (1993) 367-88.

mastered improved techniques and methods based partially on mission instruction.²⁸ But the study of religious movements in Africa, as Beidelman noted shortly thereafter, needs to account for the powerful non-political impacts of Christianity since missionaries “invariably aimed at overall changes in the beliefs and actions of native peoples, at colonization of heart and mind as well as body.”²⁹

In an early attempt to examine the connection between Christianity and agricultural change, Norman Long’s data revealed that the religious ethic of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Zambia contributed to their economic success.³⁰ His study of Kapepa parish details how the ideology of Jehovah’s Witnesses enabled farmers to disregard kinship obligations, thus significantly altering their economic behavior. Religious networks also played a role as impoverished or inexperienced churchgoers forged relationships with more established farmers in the congregation to acquire equipment or expertise. In other instances, people used church networks to resolve problems of labor or farm management. Similarly, Marcia Wright’s later study of Zambia’s Mazabuka district mentions how former residents of a local Seventh Day Adventist mission came to comprise a separate community on unoccupied reserve land. Community members pooled resources to arrange transport for crops, irrigate

²⁸ M. Dixon-Fyle, “Agricultural Improvement and Political Protest on the Tonga Plateau, Northern Rhodesia,” *Journal of African History* 18 (1977) 581.

²⁹ T.O. Beidelman, *Colonial Evangelism: A Socio-Historical Study of an East African Mission at the Grassroots* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982) 6.

³⁰ N. Long, *Social Change and the Individual: a Study of Social and Religious Responses to innovation in a Zambian Rural Community* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1968) 239: 76-78.

their fields, and surmount other local difficulties which had discouraged prior occupants.³¹

Conversely, Angela Cheater's study of Msengezi Purchase area found no general association between membership in a particular denomination and successful production or accumulation.³² While the small membership of the Vapostori weMaranke church had a higher percentage of semi-capitalized or capitalized farms, she carefully notes that in this case the relationship between religious identity and capital accumulation existed only amongst farmers using a traditional idiom of accumulation. Furthermore, she suggests that individuals in pre-colonial African societies "did adapt traditional institutions in order to circumvent pressures towards the distribution of accumulated, non-durable wealth, and there did emerge. . .a mode of individual accumulation. . .".³³ Under colonialism, this existing mode could interface with multiple variables, including Christianity, to produce forms of rural entrepreneurship.

Another significant study for insights into the mission Christianity-agricultural nexus was Terence Ranger's important analysis of peasant consciousness in Zimbabwe. He suggests that several new religious idioms figured substantially in the decisions of farmers to produce for commercial markets.³⁴

³¹ M. Wright, "Technology, Marriage and Women's Work in the History of Maize-growers in Mazabuka, Zambia: a Reconnaissance," Journal of Southern African Studies 10, 1 (1983) 75.

³² A.P. Cheater, Idioms of Accumulation: Rural Development and Class Formation among Freeholders in Zimbabwe (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1984) 94.

³³ Cheater xiv.

³⁴ T.O. Ranger, Peasant Consciousness and Guerrilla War in Zimbabwe (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) 185.

Ranger argues that aspiring peasant entrepreneurs favored membership in AMEC churches for their avowedly pro-market stance on farm production. His data also points to the eventual questioning of the mission ‘cultural package’ (including elements of Christian community, literacy, self-sufficiency, and commercial agricultural production) in the face of increasing government hostility towards peasant entrepreneurs.

In the 1990s, several of the most important works relating to the history of Southern Africa began to explore more fully the relationship between missionary activity and agricultural change in African communities. The pattern that emerges from these accounts points towards the frequency of missionary attempts to construct forms of ‘agricultural evangelism’ within their wider endeavors at conversion. Although they varied between (and even within) denominations, such efforts contain several common themes. Mission stations provided some access to different farming technologies with the intention of generating cash incomes and challenging local ritual authority. New forms of agricultural production transformed gender roles within households, although not always in ways missionaries could anticipate. African converts appropriated spiritual and technical ideas in accordance with their own needs or abilities, eventually resulting in the creation of new forms of rural Christianity.

Although it covers developments in another region, Steven Feierman’s Peasant Intellectuals includes a relevant assessment of Lutheran missionary activities in Shambaai, revealing aspects of the power they could wield in local affairs. Shambaa communities often treated early missionaries essentially as

potential rainmakers, such that individuals “spoke to them not as confidants, but as powerful and dangerous men.” After colonial occupation in Tanzania, missionaries frequently replaced chiefs as the primary source of relief during severe famines. During the crisis of 1899-1900, station populations mushroomed after food imports arrived.³⁵ These missionaries also hoped to create an example of Christian prosperity in an era when increasing numbers of men began to enter the wage economy. Early programs focused on the training of artisans and clerks, but eventually individual missionaries also promoted specific agricultural paths. With a “paternalistic desire to see their adherents prosper,” several Lutheran missions provided surrounding farmers with Arabica coffee seedlings. By 1928 over 45,000 coffee trees stood in Shambaa. ³⁶ Yet converts incessantly blended older ritual practices with their new Christian beliefs. Established ideas about harming or healing the land clearly remained important for most of the rural population, as evidenced by election to the district council of a deposed chief famous for his rainmaking abilities. The four years of drought that followed his previous removal from office apparently convinced all but the staunchest opponents of the power he could exert. The result was a landslide victory in his favor (1496-80) despite a predominantly Christian electorate.³⁷

The first volume in John and Jean Comaroff’s Of Revelation and Revolution set begins to examine the role of agriculture within broader London Missionary

³⁵ S. Feierman, Peasant Intellectuals: Anthropology and History in Tanzania (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990) 128-30.

³⁶ Feierman 161.

³⁷ Feierman 167-68.

Society (LMS) attempts to transform Tshidi-Rolong consciousness. According to the Comaroffs, much of the literature prior to 1990 contributed to the understanding of missionary roles in terms of changing relations of production and emergent class formations but virtually ignored the importance of culture, symbolism and ideology. They basically ask, by what process had missionaries wrought any changes without access to significant political and economic resources? Their analysis treats such confrontation in terms of a struggle between the missionaries and Southern Tswana for control over signs and practices, since colonizers “at most times try to gain control over both the material and semantic practices through which their would be subjects produce and reproduce the very bases of their existence. . . .”³⁸ In other words, whose social constructs - intellectual, linguistic, spiritual, spatial - would dominate this exchange of information and ideas? Missionary ideas about their surroundings often reflect fundamental aspects of the culture and society which they left behind. The outcome of missionary efforts, on the other hand, always echoed important elements of their host society as converts inevitably created new syncretic religious identities. Only recently has this deeper exploration of colonial consciousness become prevalent.

The establishment of mission farms and gardens therefore entailed much more than a response to the basic economic imperatives of missionary work. LMS missionaries tried to “make their agricultural labors into an exercise in moral instruction. . .what they were sowing was a new hegemony.”³⁹ Their notions of

³⁸ J.L. Comaroff and J. Comaroff, “The Colonization of Consciousness in South Africa,” Economy and Society 18, 3 (1989) 268.

³⁹ Comaroff and Comaroff, Of Revelation and Revolution, vol. 1, 36.

civilization and appropriate prosperity revolved heavily around the seemingly inherent attributes of sedentary agriculture. As in much of Southern Africa, implementing any program of farming in a dryland environment immediately brought control over water resources to the forefront of missionary relations with Tshidi political and ritual authorities. Missionaries hoped to appropriate power “over water and well-being” through the construction of various irrigation systems.⁴⁰

Successful performance of the annual rainmaking rituals, upon which the continuity of chiefly authority often balanced, appeared to the LMS as “the essence of savage unreason.” Irrigation technology would therefore quite publicly represent the application of a rational knowledge to overcome and master the natural environment. The Comaroffs utilize the contested terrain of water to expose one of the main contradictions of broader ‘agricultural evangelism’ in Southern Africa: missionaries constantly sought to provide a “quasi-scientific” explanation for “the magic of water” while simultaneously asserting the fundamental authority of God over nature.⁴¹ But the dense connections between Tshidi ritual authority and agricultural methods would not easily disintegrate. Converts created their own forms of Christian identity which reflected the continued necessity of confronting agricultural uncertainty through spiritual faith.

The second volume of the ambitious Comaroff project on the extended encounter between the Southern Tswana and British missionaries also points to the

⁴⁰ Comaroff and Comaroff, Of Revelation and Revolution, vol. 1, 203.

⁴¹ Comaroff and Comaroff, Of Revelation and Revolution, vol. 1, 208.

central importance of agriculture in LMS evangelical efforts. A thorough, durable spiritual conversion would depend upon remaking multiple facets of Tswana economic and social patterns, or “the terrain of everyday practice.” Recognizing that much of Tswana religious identity coalesced around agriculturally-based rituals and symbols, LMS missionaries sought to construct a completely transformed worldview upon the foundation of prescribed farming methods. Religious conversion in rural African communities necessarily became “a matter of both culture and agriculture.”⁴² Missionaries hoped expanded sedentary farming would promote and perpetuate a new civilization based upon the individuated production of surplus crops for new markets.

Any demonstrable success in the mundane realm of agricultural methods would publicly challenge various impediments to their evangelism, such as belief “that successful cultivation depended on the observance of taboos. . . ; that female pollution could cause the clouds or the crops to abort; that the fertility of fields might be increased by the ministrations of medicine men. . . .” LMS personnel also wished to diminish the controls of established political authority, regarding the ritual power of Tswana chiefs as “a major obstacle to the development of an agrarian economy based on private enterprise, commodity production, and free labor.”⁴³ There were other impediments to a simple wholesale adoption of the missionary model for rural society. A transition to plough-based production presupposed a certain level of wealth required for the purchase of technology and provision of

⁴² Comaroff and Comaroff, Of Revelation and Revolution, vol. 2, 119-21.

⁴³ Comaroff and Comaroff, Of Revelation and Revolution, vol. 2, 128-29.

draft power. Market-oriented production also confronted the existing division of agricultural labor, as men who ploughed increasingly gained control over the sale of crops produced largely by women's regular cultivation and care. The Comaroffs conclude, "to the degree that males entered the arable sector, the gendered politics of production were radically altered."⁴⁴

The Jesuit missionaries at Chishawasha who Elizabeth Schmidt describes in Peasants, Traders, and Wives viewed agricultural instruction largely as a critical component in teaching Shona pupils the dignity of labor. This order had no desire to create a group of school graduates that had "contempt for the pick and the shovel."⁴⁵ Mission houses and buildings went up with materials paid for through the sales of surplus produce in nearby Salisbury. As on many mission farms, student labor became integral to continued viability of the agricultural production that underwrote educational and evangelistic activities. This education also emphasized a new ordering of household labor, reflecting an essential missionary perception of women as actors only within the domestic realm. The training program offered to female students at Waddilove, a Wesleyan mission school, insisted that pupils should learn cooking with food they had produced themselves.⁴⁶ Girls at Chisawasha also grew sisal for their handicraft production which provided substantial income for the mission. But mission education itself did not provide most girls with substantive training for life outside the domestic sphere.

⁴⁴ Comaroff and Comaroff, Of Revelation and Revolution, vol. 2, 142.

⁴⁵ E. Schmidt, Peasants, Traders and Wives: Shona Women in the History of Zimbabwe, 1870-1939 (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1992) 127-28.

⁴⁶ Schmidt 134.

Henrietta Moore and Megan Vaughn's analysis of colonial agricultural improvement schemes in Cutting Down Trees assesses the prominent place of mission-educated men in government efforts to create 'progressive' farmers. Because these programs entailed substantive shifts in personal behavior, colonial policies presumed that "engagement in farming involved an ideological and political commitment, and not merely an economic calculation."⁴⁷ 'Progressive' farmers were supposed to reject antiquated methods, break the constraints of kinship obligations, and build 'proper' houses/households that included educated children and a domesticated wife. By the 1950s, men such as John Mboo and Kenneth Kaunda had "an investment in modernity and in the benefits of modern education and modern agriculture."⁴⁸ This outlook allowed them to utilize official agricultural programs for their own agendas. While Moore and Vaughn utilize missionary records to understand the relationship between being Bemba and practicing *citemene*, they do not fully discuss mission communities or Christianity in the context of changing perceptions of farming. Given the evidence from elsewhere in the region, however, it seems likely that mission Christianity played a role in the formation of local attitudes towards government agricultural policies.

Paul Landau examines additional aspects of 'agricultural evangelization' in The Realm of the Word. LMS missionaries among the BaNgwato Tswana utilized existing agricultural rites as the basis for a new Christian form of rural spirituality. Community prayers of thanksgiving gradually supplanted a local version of the

⁴⁷ H. Moore and M. Vaughn, Cutting Down Trees: Gender, Nutrition, and Agricultural Change in the Northern Province of Zambia, 1890-1990 (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1994) 125.

⁴⁸ Moore and Vaughn 113.

widespread first fruits ceremony.⁴⁹ The missionaries helped converts create a Christian alternative to the annual ritual in which the ruler opened the ploughing season. This new *letsema* drew thousands by 1900. Men and women also apparently made particular efforts to attend Sunday prayers during the planting season. The ruler's ceremonial sanction of reaping that followed months later soon began to occur within a popular Christian service.⁵⁰ More prosperous BaNgwato households expanded their grain production with plough technology, creating new forms of power in both the public and private sphere. Wealth flowed from royalty to the entrepreneurs even as male control of cattle ensured their place in a new farming and transport system dependent upon draft power. While the plough could lessen women's early season labor in preparing lands for planting, their regular harvest and threshing period could not easily accommodate the expanded acreages this new technology made possible. Male household heads attempted to assert control over expanded surpluses and the negotiated allocation of grain supplies thereafter "reflected the new positioning of men at the start of the productive cycle."⁵¹

Steven Edgington's 1996 dissertation is perhaps the most direct attempt to address the role of agriculture within missionary enterprise. Although he does not cover all of colonial Zimbabwe, the scope of his study does extend to cover the

⁴⁹ P. Landau, The Realm of the Word: Language, Gender, and Christianity in a Southern African Kingdom (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1995) 24.

⁵⁰ Landau, Realm of the Word, 31.

⁵¹ Landau, Realm of the Word, 104.

farming activities of five denominations through 1939.⁵² While he assesses mission farms within the context of settler colonialism, central themes of economic and control imperatives drive his analysis of these complex, differentiated communities. In examining these issues, he does lay substantial groundwork for additional studies of mission farming systems. However, this focus largely bypasses the importance of missions and agriculture to broader issues of culture, ideology, and identity.

In his highly regarded Voices From the Rocks, Terence Ranger describes the ‘agricultural confidence’ exhibited by Brethren of Christ missionaries arriving from Kansas farms to evangelize amid the Matopos hills of southwestern Zimbabwe. They subsequently “did their best to reshape the landscape” and had “no intention of leaving this idyllic scene to nature.”⁵³ The Brethren established a mission farm in 1899 and managed to attract the required labor by holding tea drinks, thereby tempering the community practice of labor in exchange for sorghum beer to fit within the prohibitions of their doctrine. The missionaries also accessed local draft power, borrowing cattle to plough their fields and returning them with the hope the owners could use the foundation of a trained team to begin their individual agricultural transformation. Within fifteen years African ‘ploughmen’ surrounded the mission, with many extending their initial holdings to supply the expanding market of nearby Bulawayo. This produced rapid changes in the gender division of labor as women experienced an intensification of their labor in planting and

⁵² S.D. Edgington, “Economic and Social Dimensions of Mission Farms on the Mashonaland Highveld, 1890-1930s,” dissertation, UCLA, 1996.

⁵³ T.O. Ranger, Voices From the Rocks: Nature, Culture and History in the Matopos Hills of Zimbabwe (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999) 47-49.

cultivating to match the extension of tilled area. Ranger, however, is careful to balance the new income potential that drove these changes with less tangible influences such as the mission's impressive overall "atmosphere of miracle and its message of divine power." It was these entrepreneurial 'ploughmen', together with more numerous small peasant producers, who eventually became the focus of intensifying colonial conservation efforts despite evidence that mining camps impacted the Matopos environment much more severely.⁵⁴

Given the range of issues relating to Christianity and agriculture which these prominent recent works introduce, more focused studies of mission farming programs are needed to better reveal the multiplicity of individual experiences within broad patterns of rural change. Missionary efforts to transform African agriculture varied with denomination, personality and background, station geography, and available resources. Despite their purposefulness, the missionaries themselves could not normally control or direct the manner in which converts utilized both technical and spiritual messages to face the colonial world.

This dissertation explores the relationship between religious identity and economic behavior by examining the various facets of AMEC 'agricultural evangelism' in a period of growing state intervention. Although missionaries of all denominations necessarily saw themselves foremost as agents of religious conversion, more mundane practices immediately became part of evangelization efforts, particularly among Protestant churches. Education, clothing, housing, and sanitation habits each formed a significant aspect of the new identity presented wholly for converts to absorb or internalize. This 'cultural package' also influenced

⁵⁴ Ranger, Voices From the Rocks, 50-51: 57.

individual economic pursuits, since acquiring the symbols of proper Christian living normally involved gaining access to cash incomes. These multiple priorities converged in the realm of agriculture, recognized by missionaries and government officials alike as the material and ritual core of most African societies. Any spiritual conversion would therefore remain temporary without an accompanying change in farming methods.

The study focuses on six of the largest AMEC mission centers in colonial Zimbabwe. Each center possessed its own local socio-economic geography and the surrounding communities each experienced the late colonial period differently. The period between 1939-1962 draws the most intense focus for two major reasons. Few previous studies of missions in Zimbabwe extend beyond the 1930s. More importantly, however, these years mark a period of intensified government concern with agriculture and conservation on lands designated for African occupation. Further examination of the relationships between African agriculture, mission Christianity, and state policy therefore crucial becomes for understanding an era of various comprehensive attempts at social engineering. Serious consideration of these issues addresses some important questions: to what extent did mission-based networks provide African farmers with the social or technical resources for managing land and labor in new ways? how did missions mediate state-peasant relations amidst the expanding scope of official programs? did missions enable local farmers to deal effectively with increasing government intervention or were they rendered more vulnerable? Finally, what conclusions can be drawn about the broader connections between religious identity and economic behavior? Exploring

such questions offers new insights on a period important for understanding both economic change in colonial Zimbabwe and the historical context of contemporary rural development efforts.

Chapter 2 explores the motivations and assumptions which shaped AMEC missionary activities in colonial Zimbabwe. Beginning with trends in American Protestant thought on the mission enterprise, it then examines missionary impressions of African agriculture and its effects upon local communities. The chapter also looks closely at how missionaries attempted to transform the ritual and social practices associated with local farming patterns that they encountered. It argues that converts adapted or appropriated those aspects of missionary messages on agriculture which best fit their personal situation and goals.

Chapter 3 analyzes the peculiar relationship between mission and government policies on African agriculture. The similarities in these approaches were based on more than general assumptions about the nature of local farming methods. Many commonalties emerged from the rural background and university education that certain AMEC missionaries shared with the longtime head of government agricultural programs for Africans, himself an American and former missionary. As official intervention expanded in the rural areas, mission communities experienced a variety of circumstances, occasionally buffered but usually still vulnerable to encroaching state land and livestock policies.

Chapter 4 examines the economic importance of farming in the variety of mission communities. Mission educational and evangelical efforts relied substantially upon making productive use of extensive land holdings. Any

expansion of outstation schools required funding drawn from the tithing of local churches. Parents' ability to pay school fees largely depended on the success or failure of their agricultural efforts. Attempts to boost productivity on mission lands produced differing results, including irrigation schemes and new efforts to control tenant farming methods.

Chapter 5 builds around pupils' experiences with agriculture during the course of their mission education. For much of the period under investigation, instruction in farming methods was an important part of a curriculum designed to prepare pupils for a return to rural life in the reserves. Student labor remained an integral element of overall mission efforts to attain some level of station self-sufficiency in foodstuffs. Agricultural courses involved substantial amounts of 'general work' by which student labor produced the bulk of boarding school rations. But students and parents often held educational agendas distinctly different than mission officials.

Chapter 6 outlines several family histories to illustrate the variety of entrepreneurial strategies that emerged in these rural mission communities. Access to transport and markets usually determined the nature of opportunity for commercial activities. Mission stations themselves could comprise a marketplace, as well as contact with more regularized transit lines. While many recognized entrepreneurs maintained long-term mission connections, other factors seriously influenced the direction and success (or failure) of their commercial enterprises.

Chapter 7 discusses how the nature of available sources has influenced the understanding of missions and agricultural change in Southern Africa. Similar to

their government counterparts, missionary accounts present a series of historical snapshots that place themselves squarely in the foreground. Uncritical acceptance of this material has led towards a popular version of the rural past in which converts passively adopt the mission cultural and agricultural package. In some ways, this interpretation continues to shape religious identity amongst contemporary United Methodist adherents.

Chapter 8 concludes the study by assessing the long-term relationship between agricultural evangelism and agrarian change in colonial Zimbabwe. Specific aspects of mission Christianity did influence practical farming behavior but often in an unanticipated manner. Religious affiliation could shape economic behavior, yet for most individuals it constituted only one of several identities competing for public expression.

CHAPTER 2

ONLY YOUR HANDS SHOULD WORK: AGRICULTURE, SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION, AND AMEC MISSIONS IN COLONIAL ZIMBABWE

This chapter examines various ideas vital to shaping the American Methodist Episcopal Church (AMEC) mission enterprise in colonial Zimbabwe. It begins with an overview of Protestant missionary thought in the United States, for it constituted an important element in the formulation of general mission policy and goals. Basic assumptions about the purposes of missionary activity actually produced a variety of programs in the field, many depending upon denominational priorities. An important and useful way of approaching this struggle lies in defining the relationship between religious beliefs and the character/organization of missionary activities. Yet an analysis limited to this strategy may overlook decisive forces, since the basis for mission policy often relates to “values and beliefs not essentially part of basic Christian theology”¹ Thus, the cultural background of the missionary becomes crucial to understanding interactions with African people and the colonial system. Pursuit of these goals within the particular context of settler colonialism in Southern Africa produced an extended missionary concern with African agriculture.

Most mission programs in colonial Zimbabwe incorporated some form of agricultural training, but it commonly remained peripheral to their educational

¹ Beidelman, “Social Theory,” 241.

goals. AMEC missions always considered agriculture as a high priority, although the results that this interest yielded varied over the period in question. Discussion then moves to the relationship between agricultural methods and cultural practices, exploring how converts appropriated certain elements of mission Christianity to suit their own purposes. Missionaries themselves had broader hopes concerning the social impact of any transformation in agricultural methods. The chapter concludes with a consideration of the Lord's Acre, a mission program meant to represent the most important aspects of a Christian farming ethic. While this program included all the elements of a Christian farming idiom, it also illustrates the difficulties that frequently beset the various mission farming endeavors.

During the 1890s, a liberal theology of missions, hitherto focused on problems of urbanization and social transformation within the United States, began to search for a variety of Christianity suitable for export to colonial domains. According to William Hutchison, discussions of missions at this time “turned rather naturally toward the more positive work of defining just what it is that Christianity has to offer the world, and on what terms the offer should be made.”² By 1900, this shift had not moved concern for missions beyond a minority of Protestant church members. Yet this gradually expanding minority has been characterized as earnest, confident and articulate.³

² W. Hutchison, The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976) 133.

³ W. Hutchison, Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) 91.

The publication of Max Weber's The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (1905) only reaffirmed the necessity of missions to Africa, since it evidently demonstrated the role of religion in the creation of modern Western civilization. Although he carefully noted the attendant factors which produced capitalism in Europe, for missionaries driven by a particular calling, Weber's theories would resonate strongly with their own ideas of purpose. By this point in the early 20th Century, that a new religious identity could foster specific material and social changes had already become a central tenet of increasingly activist Protestant missionary societies. Many felt their designs for model Christian communities in Africa could never survive without removing converts from the influences of a superstitious or backward environment. Complete conversion would require individuals to use new economic strategies or skills in establishing a Christian household independent of traditional ritual and kinship constraints.

Despite its critics, The Protestant Ethic certainly reinforced these missionaries' view of their own place in history. Civilization in Africa would begin upon a Christian foundation, with subsequent rational economic behavior to finance its completion. But Weber himself did not predict such a quick and easy transformation towards his definition of modern capitalism. He actually argued that its emergence in the West was the product of a specific historical conjuncture. As such, Weber never argues that religion comprised sufficient causation for the transition to capitalism. He states near the conclusion of his analysis, "it is not my aim to substitute for a one-sided materialistic an equally one-sided spiritualistic causal interpretation of culture and of history. Each is equally possible, but each, if

it does not serve as the preparation, but as the conclusion of an investigation, accomplishes little in the interest of historical truth.”⁴

Yet most missionaries, according to their very worldview, naturally tended to place more emphasis upon the primary role of spiritual transformation. Believing Africans lacked any ascetic tradition, missionaries and colonial officials alike regarded religious conversion essential to the creation of either proletarians or entrepreneurs. Like Weber, they believed that “the most important opponent with which the spirit of capitalism...has had to struggle, was that type of attitude and reaction to new situations which we may designate as traditionalism.”⁵ Weber’s primary example of this obstacle, the difficulties encountered by employers utilizing piece-rates, closely resembles widely held colonial economic theories such as the backward-sloping labor curve. In each case, analysis rested upon the presumption that “a man does not ‘by nature’ wish to earn more and more money, but simply to live as he is accustomed to live and to earn as much as is necessary for that purpose.”⁶ These ideas fortified already ubiquitous colonial attitudes about ‘traditionalism’ and ‘laziness’ within African societies that remained somehow closer to the ‘natural’ state of humanity. In much of southern Africa, settler

⁴ M. Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (1905; New York: Routledge, 1993) 183.

⁵ Weber 58-59. This fundamental conclusion still undergirds much contemporary analysis of economic behavior in Africa. For example, according to one study, African religion “provides no mental frame which could easily link with the impersonal instrumentalism and functionalist rigidity of modern capitalism or which could smoothly assimilate the capitalist ethos of ‘profit for profit’s sake’ and the compulsive pursuit of surplus which subjects human desires to economic necessities.” V. Wild, Profit Not for Profit’s Sake: History and Business Culture of African Entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe (Harare: Baobab, 1997) 157.

⁶ Weber 60.

governments would eventually deem a variety of coercive measures quite appropriate to ‘rescue’ indigenous peoples from a static pre-capitalist world.

The World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910 moved awareness and concern for overseas missionary activity to a new level. Scholars have consistently interpreted this event as a major breakthrough for missionary enterprise as a whole. For example, Beaver contends that the conference clarified the basic principles of mission and solidified commitment to overseas activity for the remainder of the decade. Churches now had to develop foreign missionary boards to appear in the mainstream of American religious life.⁷ The optimism initiated by Edinburgh rapidly diminished in the aftermath of the First World War. Charles Forman describes a return to normalcy: “in reaction to idealism came a wave of cynicism and in disillusionment with internationalism came a revival of isolationism.”⁸ By his account, inter-war contributions to mission boards declined first as a result of demoralization and then from economic depression.

Consequently, the 1920s are commonly perceived as a period of general retrenchment in American mission work, with a serious decline in the student volunteer movement as perhaps the most conspicuous symptom. Beaver argues the economic dislocation of the 1930’s only exacerbated this tendency which by mid-decade had thrown “the whole Protestant missionary enterprise into reverse.”⁹

⁷ R.P. Beaver, “American Protestant Theological Seminary and Missions: an Historical Survey,” *Missionology* 4, 1 (1976) 84.

⁸ C. Forman, “A History of Foreign Mission Theory in America,” *American Missions in Bicentennial Perspective*, ed. R.P. Beaver (South Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1977) 96.

⁹ Beaver, “Theological Seminary and Missions,” 84.

Bowden seemingly agrees, noting an abandonment of many important programs established in previous years. But his account moves further towards a more subtle interpretation while making some significantly broader conclusions. The inter-war era did not entail the complete failure of mission programs, “but it served as the background for a certain curtailment of action, this congruent with the more radical collapse of religious influence in America itself.”¹⁰ This trend would continue to shape the mission enterprise for decades. Indeed, Hutchison points to data indicating a decrease of personnel after 1935 that reduced mainline Protestant mission staffs by over two-thirds (from 10,000 to 3,000 by 1980). Yet the absolute number of missionaries increased to over 35,000. The preceding era of dominance in missionary work by mainline Protestant churches had ended with conservative evangelicalism reasserting itself over ecumenical liberalism.¹¹

Yet for many parts of Africa, the 1920s brought a new generation of missionaries into service. Education, agriculture, community development and politics became legitimate areas for focused missionary involvement.¹² At certain points in this new activism, the ideals of a Western society, encompassing even material aspirations, were portrayed as a complete cultural package. In other instances missionaries made a clear distinction between the constructive and

¹⁰ H.W. Bowden, “An Overview of Cultural Factors in the American Protestant Missionary Enterprise,” *American Missions in Bicentennial Perspective*, ed. R.P. Beaver (South Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1977) 57.

¹¹ W. Hutchison, “Americans in World Mission: Revision and Realignment,” *Altered Landscapes: Christianity in America, 1935-1985*, eds. Lotz, Shriver, and Wilson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1989) 155.

¹² Strayer, *Making Mission Communities*, 8.

destructive elements of modern life.¹³ One common example was their idealized view of African village life in contrast to the ill effects of industrialization. While many activist missionaries espoused ideas about the commercial and material foundations of an African Christian community, they tended to reject those aspects of European influence patently urban or secular. Rather, missionary thought often “envisaged that traditional African society, once shorn of its grossest abuses and infused with Christianity, would represent a more desirable cultural alternative and better base for future development. . . .”¹⁴

The liberal theology of overseas mission marked a significant departure from the long-standing evangelical emphasis on conversion. Liberals were much more inclined to envision world mission as an active Christian presence. Hutchison characterizes liberal thinkers as defining conversion not on an individual basis but rather striving towards an overall restructuring of host societies. His analysis parallels Beaver's in stressing the connection liberals commonly made between individual spiritual welfare and the more general condition of body, mind, and society.¹⁵ A contradiction inherent to this outlook disturbed many of its adherents. Their unwillingness to affirm proactively the preeminence of a ‘western civilization’ led to some hesitancy in declaring the superiority of Christianity as a world religion. Subsequently, within liberal mission theory the affirmation of Christianity's truth

¹³ Beidelman, “Social Theory,” 236-40.

¹⁴ R. Strayer, “Mission History in Africa: New Perspectives on an Encounter,” *African Studies Review* 19, 1 (1976) 13.

¹⁵ Hutchison, “Americans in World Mission,” 159. See also R.P. Beaver, “North American Thought on the Fundamental Principles of Missions during the Twentieth Century,” *Church History* 21 (1952) 350.

emerged alongside the recognition of value in other religions/cultures. Hutchison concludes that liberal Christians “did indeed want to have it both ways. . .that they wished both to affirm a God-infused natural and cultural order and to maintain the specificity of a Christian revelation.”¹⁶

The association drawn between missionary endeavors and general social conditions nevertheless seemed to necessitate a certain level of proficiency in dealing with issues of local concern. Forman posits that this emphasis on competency became strong enough to cause some mission theorists to recommend closure of inadequate facilities in order to concentrate resources on more successful enterprises.¹⁷ The eventual goal of consolidation would be a smaller cohort of missionaries, better trained and more capable of dealing with particular individual or social needs. Consequently, a more activist theory of mission gradually developed in coherence and popularity during the 1920s. By the early 1930s, it could effectively be considered the official foreign policy of American mainline Protestant churches.

This outlook solidified largely in reaction to a series of commission reports which had disparaged the widespread lack of missionary training in methods for social transformation. Most notably, the ecumenical 1932 Laymen's Inquiry report “conveyed a sense that the missionary hero. . .was nonetheless a kind of loose cannon, bumbling and banging around in virtual ignorance of his surroundings.”¹⁸

¹⁶ Hutchison, Modernist Impulse, 113.

¹⁷ Forman 101.

¹⁸ Hutchison, Errand to the World, 164.

The report explicitly confirmed the inherent value of educational and social services to missionary efforts. The report designates these services as legitimate functions of missions, even when distinctly separated from any specific evangelical message. According to Hutchison, the activist missionary during this period became “the religious representative of what the American culture as a whole was commonly perceived to be.”¹⁹

Beaver, however, rightly cautions to avoid conflating such attitudes with actualities. While liberal theology unquestionably gained influence during the 1920's, he argues that since it directly challenged many of the pre-suppositions of foreign missionary enterprise, missionary circles remained more resistant than most other sectors within the churches.²⁰ In the years following the Laymen's Inquiry, the majority of American missionary leaders actually rejected many of its specific recommendations, demonstrating that the mission theory/theology of the commission often clashed with that of the mission staff. Most missionaries fully accepted neither the liberal relation of Christianity to other religions nor the conservative doctrine of discontinuity.²¹

Furthermore, the liberal/activist conception of mission did not go unchallenged. These views came under attack during the 1920s from conservative

¹⁹ W. Hutchison, “American Missionary Ideologies: ‘Activism’ as Theory, Practice, and Stereotype,” *Studies in the History of Christian Thought*, ed. H. Oberman (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1979) 351.

²⁰ Beaver, “North American Thought on Missions,” 349.

²¹ Beaver, “North American Thought on Missions,” 352-54.

evangelical thinkers in the United States and Germany.²² Both segments generally agreed upon the ongoing mistake of permitting educational and social services to gain ascendancy over ‘true’ evangelism. They deemed liberal theories of social Christianity successful only in distracting people from attention to God. Moreover, the German evangelical writers opposed American activism with the contention that the goal of activism was not religious conversion. Rather, the Germans perceived American intentions as a form of cultural imperialism seeking to convert others to a particular style of religion and civilization.

By the late 1920s, having been forced to face the relative success of liberal missionary efforts, conservative evangelicals posited the necessity of a choice in mission between Christian orthodoxy and no Christianity at all. This theme unified those evangelicals who felt confident that continued liberal policies would “cut the nerve of missions.”²³ Beaver also confronts this issue in discussing the conservative response to the Laymen’s Inquiry. This reply reaffirmed their emphasis on evangelical conversion as the sole valid purpose of missionary activity. Furthermore, they denied the validity and affirmed the essential failure of any religion not based upon the Bible. Accordingly, “the Gospel cannot be presented as a set of truths, a system of ethics or a social program, although such may be by-products. . . .”²⁴ This view in particular raised a contentious issue amongst liberal

²² Hutchison deals with this issue more extensively than any other author. For examples, see Errand to the World, 125; Modernist Impulse, 155 and 258-260; “American Missionary Ideologies,” 353-54.

²³ Hutchison, Modernist Impulse, 259.

²⁴ Beaver, “North American Thought on Missions,” 353.

activists. How could one promote Christianity as the best religion for humankind while simultaneously attempting to accept the validity and strength of other religious systems?

At another, often unrecognized level, liberal missionaries also had to question to what extent they perpetuated a parallel process on cultural and material issues. Forman argues that liberals' outward concern and respect for other cultures meant they had to oppose outright imperialist domination but could still support an altruistic imperialism based on cultural/material exchange.²⁵ Forman's interpretation meshes well with other scholars emphasis on the notion of progress. Beaver contends that conceptions of progress help to explain missionary enthusiasm and optimism. Progress in social transformation and economic improvement nearly became more important than the progress of religious conversion. In some sense, "the kingdom of God came to be confused with *progress* to a considerable degree, that is, with the development and extension of modern European technological civilization."²⁶

Given that liberal activism offered deliverance through social services, it was somewhat inevitable that certain institutions in American culture would be presented as crucial to this redemption. Even serious attention to distinguishing between Christian values and cultural mores could not ameliorate this contradictory situation. Submerged ethnocentrism decreased the absolute distinctions which

²⁵ Forman 85.

²⁶ R.P. Beaver, "Missionary Motivation through Three Centuries," Reinterpretation in American Church History, ed. J. Brauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968) 131.

liberals and conservatives attempted to draw between themselves. According to Hutchison, both sides suffered from a “common inability to take seriously any norms or testimonies not originating in Western Christendom, an unwillingness to grant exotic cultures the kind of hearing automatically expected for Christian and Western values.”²⁷ The tensions between various theories of mission enterprise would often emerge in the particular orientation of mission systems and programs.

In colonial Zimbabwe, the AMEC directed its efforts primarily towards rural society, to communities which for missionaries seemingly comprised “first of all, an agricultural people” that would continue “to live by some kind of agriculture whether good or poor.”²⁸ Most generally, the Shona agricultural knowledge and practices encountered by the early AMEC missionaries were the long term result of complex decisions made annually to gauge opportunity against constraint. The bulk of pre-colonial farming in eastern Zimbabwe took place within forms of a swidden system known as *chibhakera*. The most widely planted food crops included varieties of sorghums, millets, rice, maize, cowpeas and groundnuts. Households also grew a variety of other supplements, with pumpkins, beans, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, melons, and lemons among the most popular choices.²⁹ Seasonably available wild fruits provided additional nutrition and culturally-valued variations in diet. Cattle and goats formed an important part of this agricultural system, more as

²⁷ Hutchison, Errand to the World, 113.

²⁸ OMA: The Methodist Episcopal Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1937) 137. See also UMCA George Roberts Papers: G. Roberts, “Africa Letter,” 23 March 1938.

²⁹ D.N. Beach, The Shona and their Neighbors (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994) 55; Palmer, “Agricultural History,” 223.

accumulated insurance against potential crop failure or drought, however, than as sources for regular domestic meat consumption.³⁰

From crop selection to harvest, any family's level of connectedness with local ecology and society largely determined their farming performance. Knowledge of soil types, crop behavior, and typical rainfall patterns all figured in calculating yearly production efforts. Necessary additional labor or inputs commonly depended upon relationships with other individuals and households in the community. With consent of the local chief or headman, fathers allocated sons land upon marriage for the use of their new household. These rights remained usufruct, with land reverting to communal status upon lack of use. Therefore, although individual men held land rights, the continuation of access depended heavily upon the entirety of household labor.³¹ Peak season tasks such as field clearance or harvesting generated intense short-term labor requirements. The practice of holding a *nhimbe* (work party), wherein the provision of beer encouraged a crucial exchange of extra-household labor, usually worked to the advantage of successful farmers who had more harvested grain available for beer production. Those households without sufficient surplus for brewing found it difficult to attract additional labor with any regularity.³²

Under *chibhakera*, male tasks tended to revolve around several peak periods in the agricultural year. When clearing land for initial planting, younger men

³⁰ Beach, *The Shona and their Neighbors*, 57.

³¹ Schmidt 44.

³² Beach, *The Shona and their Neighbors*, 59; I. Phimister, *An Economic and Social History of Zimbabwe 1890-1948: Capital Accumulation and Class Struggle* (New York: Longman, 1988) 73.

moved with hoes in a retreating fashion to raise a first series of *harwa* (low ridges) across the field.³³ Men and women then followed together, increasing the initial ridges. Meanwhile other men cut selected trees within several feet of ground level while women gathered the branches into nearby *mavivi* (piles for burning). Men might also enclose these new fields by creating a *ruzhowa* (hedge of cut branches).³⁴ The *mavivi* usually dried for several months before being burnt, their ashes scattered, and turned into the ridges with hoes. Women would eventually plant seed along the ridge tops. *Chibhakera* relied upon intercropping techniques to maximize both basic household food security and a preferred variety in diet.³⁵ Intercropping also helped to conserve female farm labor, since it at least minimized the most regular, time-consuming tasks such as weeding which remained the responsibility of women. Women controlled the produce of smaller plots they held within household lands but spent most of their time in the larger fields whose crops remained under male authority.³⁶

Chibhakera operated as one part of a wider belief system through which Shona peoples managed their relationship with the unpredictable world around them. In order to ensure survival amid a powerfully charged landscape, agricultural production remained subject to a ritual structure that attempted to mediate between human activity and natural forces. Missionaries therefore arrived to find an environment already immersed in spiritual symbols and meanings. Although

³³ NAZ file AOH/37: Testimony of Chari Rwambiwa (April 1978) 18-22.

³⁴ NAZ file AOH/51: Testimony of Pauros Mugwagwa Musonza (March-April 1979) 26-28.

³⁵ NAZ file AOH/32: Testimony of Chief Marufu Chikwakwa (February 1978) 30.

³⁶ Schmidt 44.

following *Mwari* (a supreme god) grew increasingly popular during the late 19th Century, in agricultural matters most Shona peoples concerned themselves more directly with their local *mhondoro* (territorial spirit). Land actually belonged to the *mhondoro* with the chief only acting on its behalf. The *mhondoro* determined annual rainfall, soil fertility, and crop pests. Significant annoyance of the *mhondoro* could result in community-wide punishments such as drought or locusts.³⁷ In other instances, parts of forested land became classified as *dambakurimwa* and could never fall under cultivation because of their significance as home to *vadzimu* (ancestral spirits). According to author Matsosha Mike Hove, “there were always areas which were demarcated for spiritual purposes. . .Certain areas were the abodes of the spirit world...So the soil had the knowledge, it provided a spiritual map of an area, and this knowledge was passed on from generation to generation.”³⁸

Community recognition of the spiritual power over agriculture occurred in many different ritual moments. Prior to beginning each agricultural year, the entire community provided grain for brewing the ritual beer used to conduct *chipwa* or *mukwerere* (prayers for rain). This ceremony usually took place at the local *rutumba* (*mhondoro* shrine) located near a specific tree outside the residential perimeter.³⁹ At this ceremony household representatives also received the ritual seed that opened the planting season. However, nobody could work the soil on the

³⁷ M. Gelfand, Ukama: Reflections on Shona and Western Cultures in Zimbabwe (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1981) 9-10.

³⁸ C. Hove and I. Trojanow, Guardians of the Soil: Meeting Zimbabwe's Elders (Harare: Baobab, 1996) 52-53.

³⁹ M.F.C. Bourdillon, The Shona Peoples: An Ethnography of the Contemporary Shona, With Special Reference to Their Religion (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1976) 301-302.

day of this ceremony. Throughout the subsequent growing season, communities regularly reproduced this initial observance through *chisi*, a specified day each week when every household refrained from farm labor to honor the *mhondoro* and its power over agriculture.⁴⁰ Harvest and consumption of crops also fell under ritual sanction. A *mushashe* (first fruits) ceremony preceded any enjoyment of the season's labor. This ritual also took place at the *rutumba*. Once again, the community provided grain for beer production. *Vazukuru* (elders) went into the fields to gather samples from the entire range of crops. After gathering this produce around the *rutumba*, the *vazukuru* dedicated it to the *vadzimu* and all households could then partake of their own crops. Ignoring this phase in the ritual calendar risked the destruction of everyone's fields by locusts.⁴¹

Individuals also sought to utilize less public rituals in order to ensure abundant agricultural results. Some farmers employed various types of *muti* (specialized medicines/charms) to enhance yields. Such devices supposedly provided their user with additional safeguards for crops before and after harvest. Among the specific agricultural *muti*, for example, the most common was *divisi*, which would create an abundance of grain. *Dikibvu* also promoted crop fertility. *Rukwa* or *chipingo* were added insurance against crop theft. *Mbondokoto* would protect granaries from common storage problems. While farming success remained a socially acceptable end, application of these different *muti* usually remained a

⁴⁰ Gelfand 10.

⁴¹ NAZ file AOH/12: Testimony of Chisandau Gumbo (June 1977) 30-31.

private affair since publicly “their use is held to convey an unfair advantage over others in the community.”⁴²

Several of the longest serving AMEC missionaries first encountered Shona agricultural knowledge, methods, and ritual during an extended period of food insecurity in eastern colonial Zimbabwe. In 1935 Rev. George Roberts recalled that “in the early days we saw three years in which the food supply was short and there was real suffering from hunger.”⁴³ This period culminated with the Great Drought of 1912.⁴⁴ The resultant impressions of local farming practices led these missionaries to conclude that in addition to its problematic spiritual connections, *chibhakera* could not provide households with a diet adequate in either quantity or variety. Reflecting upon these rather unfavorable initial appraisals of *chibhakera*, AMEC missionaries quickly focused on a particular model of agricultural development as central in creating self-supporting Christian communities. They hoped that as more Africans came to accept the “benevolent power of God they would be open to His plan for rational and progressive development.”⁴⁵ AMEC programs therefore stressed the gospel of the plough in order to cultivate modern entrepreneurs who utilized better farming methods. Missionaries felt a thriving peasantry would constitute a more receptive and permanent audience for their evangelical efforts, as “one whose struggle for existence is too severe has little

⁴² Bourdillon 202.

⁴³ E.L. Sells, On Trek with Christ in Southern Rhodesia (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1936) 21.

⁴⁴ J. Iliffe, Famine in Zimbabwe, 1890-1960 (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1990) 42-55.

⁴⁵ Ranger, “Protestant Missions in Africa,” 286.

likelihood of long remaining a strong Christian.”⁴⁶ Successful modern farming would also promote a more general level of stability and civilization amongst local communities.

AMEC missionaries frequently portrayed plough agriculture and market production as a fundamental part of a complete cultural package appropriate for “a people whose hearts are never far from the soil.” With the help of various mission agricultural programs “many a farmer is raising better crops, has healthier and fatter cattle, sells more eggs, eats more vegetables and fruit, plants more trees, wears better clothes, builds a better house and has more to offer his family in the way of education. . . .”⁴⁷ Yet in other instances they drew clear distinctions between the positive and negative aspects of modern life. When contrasting an idealized vision of rural life with the ill effects of industrialization, missionaries hoped to blunt the threat posed by cities to converts’ spiritual welfare and continued church membership. By the late 1930s, increasing urban labor migration was cause for concern in missionary reports from many denominations active in Southern Africa.

At that time, missionaries interpreted the problem as something more than merely colonial economic policy since many people had seemingly succumbed to the lure of the bright lights. As Rev. H.E. Taylor wrote in his 1937 report, “We must face the fact that the number who fail to return is increasing and that unless great enough interests be built up about rural life, the number who go away to stay

⁴⁶ OMA: The Methodist Episcopal Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1936) 52.

⁴⁷ OMA: The Methodist Church, Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1961) 97.

will increase. For their own sakes we are sorry that they face such a possibility.”⁴⁸ This phenomenon affected mission communities in varying degrees. Communities surrounding Murehwa, the AMEC mission closest to Salisbury, apparently experienced labor migration sufficient to warrant the posting of an African preacher there by 1930. He was charged with following up on “Methodist workers who might otherwise drift away from the church while in the city.”⁴⁹ Thus, missionary enterprise faced a dual responsibility for the social welfare of local communities, to not only make a religious impression but to also find avenues by which people would continue to stay on the land. Taylor concluded, “we must bring to bear all the powers we can use for helping make the social and economic appeal of the life in the land such as to hold our people there.”⁵⁰ Developing and promoting an economically viable system of plough-based market production became the alternative to the negative effects of labor migration on rural society.

Several of the earliest improved farming proponents within the AMEC had substantial agricultural training prior to their missionary calling. George Odlum, who arrived to take charge of the agricultural department at Old Umtali in 1901, graduated from Michigan Agricultural College (now Michigan State University).⁵¹

⁴⁸ OMA: The Methodist Episcopal Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1937) 137.

⁴⁹ J.T. Copplestone, History of Methodist Missions, vol. IV: Twentieth Century Perspectives, 1896-1939 (New York: Board of Global Ministries, 1973) 973.

⁵⁰ OMA: The Methodist Episcopal Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1937) 137.

⁵¹ E.K. Nhlawatiwa, Humble Beginnings: a Brief History of the United Methodist Church, Zimbabwe Area (Harare: United Methodist Church Zimbabwe, 1997) 18. Odlum went on to enter government service as an advisor on commercial tobacco production.

George Roberts arrived in 1907, following his graduation from Iowa State University with a B.Sc. in agriculture. His family had managed to make their Marathon (Iowa) farm pay during the tough 1890s, to the extent that all but one of eight children eventually attended university.⁵² Ideas and techniques for successful production in the American Midwest would therefore play a large role in the formulation of early AMEC agricultural programs. The perceived irrationalities of swidden cultivation, broadcast sowing and intercropping would have to be replaced by orderly, monocrop plantings that conformed to a regular annual rotation. Perhaps no other area of practical endeavor could provide such a complete analogy for what these missionaries hoped to achieve. Agricultural ‘progress’ would provide the essential foundation of a more profound social and spiritual transformation. These missionaries, however, seldom questioned whether their extensive agricultural operations, largely reliant on student labor, could even provide an appropriate example for the extension of ‘modern’ techniques. People farming only a few acres were in fact expected to better the practices employed in the relatively extensive mission fields.⁵³ AMEC missionaries often placed so much faith in the transformative potential of the plough that they simplified or ignored the other constraints in local farming systems.

In his attempt to describe the ‘typical’ African farmer, Rev. E.L. Sells recounted a conversation from the early 1930s concerning anticipated crop results. This particular farmer feared low yields would fail to carry his household through

⁵² UMCA Lulu Tubbs Papers 1079-6-2:03-04; L. Tubbs, “The Record of a Great and Useful Life,” nd., 1.

⁵³ E. Sisimayi, personal interview, 25 February 1998.

the dry season. Locusts had eaten off the maize shortly after coming up, forcing the family to replant. The next rains came in an intense downpour and compacted the soil. The family could not secure the necessary labor to keep their various fields weeded. Finally, cattle from the next village wandered into the sorghum and demolished most of the crop. The farmer managed to obtain only £2 as partial compensation. Sells' eventually interrupted, "but why don't you dig the soil deeper so that it will hold the moisture and crops will have loose earth for growing?"⁵⁴ Like so many AMEC missionaries, his response to such seasonal vagaries presented a rather narrow path to progress.

Similarly, the importance missionaries placed on transforming peasant agriculture did not produce a very thorough analysis of government land policies. Rather, many mission groups seemed to regard the consequences of a racialized land apportionment as *fait accompli*, a fact of life that only further justified their emphasis upon intensive and rational farming methods.⁵⁵ Missionary attitudes reflected the government position that "what was needed was not more good quality land available to Africans, but rather what was needed was to change African farmers. . . ."⁵⁶ By the mid-1940s, their outlook, like that of many state officials, had also turned towards the problems of natural resource conservation. Thereafter,

⁵⁴ Sells 13-14.

⁵⁵ Ranger quotes one missionary's 1923 statement on segregated land tenure: "Against such racial division in the past I have protested in principle. I could not see the justice of it. My views have undergone a change. The right of natives to purchase land anywhere means that they purchase nowhere." T.O. Ranger, The African Voice in Southern Rhodesia 1898-1930 (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970) 116.

⁵⁶ Edgington 180.

AMEC missionary discourse on agriculture frequently invoked a particular notion of stewardship. This concept sought to infuse the broader ideals of natural resource conservation with a sense of Christian duty and purpose. Human control over the environment was ordained by God, but with this power came the responsibility to utilize the land properly. In promoting their idea of stewardship, AMEC missionaries attempted to move converts beyond the state's tendency of simply presenting resource conservation as an issue for "your future generations" or "the country's economic future." Of course, missionary discourse did not discount these emphases, but stressed instead that Christian farmers had a higher spiritual obligation to cultivate their fields in a specific manner.

Not surprisingly, the specifics of AMEC stewardship tended to focus on aspects of African agriculture suspected of causing environmental degradation. Recommendations for crop rotation, appropriate fertilization, and physical soil conservation methods closely reflected newly implemented state policies. The Conference Board of Lay Activities recommended that "all Christians should be urged to carry on their farming and gardening programs in a scientific way as taught by the demonstrators and other agricultural authorities, so as to be an example to others."⁵⁷ Mission support for the policies of the Department of Native Agriculture remained fairly consistent, which meant that a particular vision of 'progressive agriculture' became embedded within their conception of stewardship. The supposed economic benefits of this stewardship would increase the ability of

⁵⁷ OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1947) 422.

communities to support church activities and expansion, once again infusing the adherence to a specific farming system with spiritual rewards.

Proper stewardship would extend to ensure that any increase in rural prosperity would also benefit the missions. In 1947, Rev. H.I James reported from Mrewa, “perhaps never was our special emphasis on stewardship more timely... the world-wide wave of materialism has not missed Rhodesia and has touched every class of her people.”⁵⁸ Just as mission agricultural policies had earlier reflected a concern over the impact of labor migration, stewardship was another attempt to use essentially agricultural methods to buffer social forces beyond missionary control. It appeared only successful peasant farming could stabilize rural populations and only a powerful notion of stewardship would channel the envisioned prosperity towards appropriate ends. Oft-repeated references to this version of stewardship represent the culmination of a long process, in which various farming technologies and methods increasingly became part of a mission Christian identity built atop the idealized ‘proper’ Christian farmer.

In reality, converts adopted and adapted elements of this identity according to their own priorities. One of the earliest missionary accounts of this process recalls the advice provided by Rev. George Roberts, then stationed at Old Umtali, to Abraham Kawadza concerning the purchase of a plough. In 1908, Kawadza questioned Roberts on the implications of plough agriculture:

‘If I get a plough, will the mealies grow the same for me as they do in your field?’ I assured him that they would. ‘If I get a plough, will

⁵⁸ OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1947) 367.

the rains come upon my field as it does on yours?" There was the fear that without the sacrifice of beer to the rainmaker there would be no rain."⁵⁹

By Roberts' recollection then, plough agriculture and indigenous religion necessarily assumed an oppositional relationship from the moment Kawadza became the first African plough owner in that locality.

Like most missionaries, Roberts felt a plough-based farming system would not only challenge the centrality of local religious rituals in seasonal production, but also promote individualization by ending dependence upon the labor garnered through the *nhimbe*. Missionaries attributed all sorts of immoral and violent behavior to these neighborly beer drinks which took place during periods of peak labor demand. By the mid-1930s, Roberts would argue that the plough made the *nhimbe* obsolete: "Thus in the breakdown of the old plan of life the heavy task of making beer with its waste of grain, the making of beer pots and the carrying of water have become unnecessary. The cattle yoked to the plough give the individual family a new outlook and plan of living."⁶⁰

Yet despite Roberts' outspoken enthusiasm, the *gospel of the plough* did not render *nhimbés* redundant. Several informants related how converts managed to reconcile the existing labor system with their newfound faith. In Shona communities, boys and girls were not allowed to consume alcohol. Many households also produced a sweet brew called *maheu* which had no intoxicating

⁵⁹ OMA: The Methodist Church, *Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference* (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1946) 227-28.

⁶⁰ Sells 21.

qualities: “The youngsters who were about fifteen or sixteen, up to about twenty years. . .would have this sweet beer. But these people now who had changed from beer drinking, also joined the youngest ones in drinking *maheu*. So there was no change whatsoever shall we say in the system of work.”⁶¹ However, acceptance of this practice amongst AMEC communities only emerged as the product of struggle between mission authorities and local congregations.

As early as 1921, the Southern Rhodesia Missionary Conference had warned all pastor-teachers about consumption of *maheu*. Apparently, the AMEC attempted to implement this advice, extending the prohibition to include all members of their congregations. It appears likely that the resistance of congregation members to a church mandate that effectively isolated them from important community events caused the Conference Board to reverse this decision in 1924. Concern, and apparently confusion, among missionaries remained, as evidenced by the Board’s suggestion that pastor-teachers promote citrus cultivation in order to provide alternative beverages. The Conference Board eventually recommended that any *maheu* drinking take place within twenty-four hours of brewing to avoid excessive fermentation prior to consumption.⁶²

The introduction of Christianity, plough-based farming and its associated techniques did not always disrupt the important social aspects of indigenous agriculture. This speaks not only to the resiliency of local cultures, but also provides insight on the broader process of African adaptation of mission doctrine.

⁶¹ E. Sisimayi, personal interview, 25 February 1998.

⁶² J.W.Z. Kurewa, The Church in Mission: a Short History of the United Methodist Church in Zimbabwe, 1897-1997 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997) 88-89.

Conversion to Christianity therefore did not necessitate the removal of oneself from community responsibilities or activities. Rather, it produced variations based on existing and accepted social norms (e.g. the production of *maheu*). Roberts' dream of ending *nhimbe* for the sake of conserving labor and food stocks would go unrealized due to the reluctance of most Christians to abandon this particularly important connection with the wider community.

Rev. Roberts also expected hope an expansion of plough ownership to gradually eliminate polygamous households. The combination of lower female labor requirements and increased yields which the plough supposedly offered would make the polygamous household irrelevant to farm production. As Roberts had viewed Kawadza's initial ploughing effort in 1908, Abraham's three wives stood by "watching with great delight the turning over of the soil as it meant emancipation from the hard work of digging the garden." Kawadza's subsequently dispersed the household as his youngest wife married another man and his eldest wife (whom he had inherited) then married one of his brothers. As a result, Kawadza "retained his rightful wife and became an active member of the Church."⁶³ But Roberts had gotten it somewhat, if not completely backwards. Although plough agriculture might lessen the labor required of women during the planting season and expand the acreage which a household might plant, it often stretched their resources well beyond normal patterns when weeding or cultivating.⁶⁴ The expansion in acreages

⁶³ OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1946) 227-28.

⁶⁴ C. Summers, From Civilization to Segregation: Social Ideals and Social Control in Southern Rhodesia, 1890-1934 (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1994) 233. See also Schmidt 70.

concurrent with the pressure to abandon polygamy would actually increase women's seasonal workloads and/or possibly a dependence upon extra-household labor.

Those Christian households able to attract extra labor through *nhimbe* or cash wages often flourished, but many others found it more difficult to cope with the demands of the plough. Some Christian families worked each others' fields cooperatively, even without *maheu*, in an arrangement known as *gumwe*. This informal arrangement based on church connections could allow between six and ten families to better cope with various peak labor situations or equipment problems. For these households, "it took the place of beer drinks, of beer used in working together like that."⁶⁵ The two practices did not exclude one another. Christian *gumwe* participants might also alternately work in the fields of beer drinkers, although they would only consume *maheu*. Work in the context of *gumwe* constituted a separate (but not an oppositional) category from a *nhimbe* with *maheu*. Thus, the *gumwe* again provides evidence of a particular Christian utilization of local reciprocity arrangements which remained flexible enough to accommodate church doctrine and household labor requirements.

In another instance, tension with conventional ideas concerning agricultural fertility prompted converts to redefine the concept of *divisi*. The word represents a category of knowledge and practice specifically related to the promotion of farm production through use of *muti*: "They used to say it is the herb to put in the field so you'll have a lot of yields. We have never proved that it is working but it was

⁶⁵ E. Sisimayi, personal interview, 25 February 1998. The *gumwe* arrangement appears similar to what Cheater's informants termed *machangano*, a form of specified labor reciprocity. See Cheater 64-66.

there.”⁶⁶ Another informant remembered, “It was secret. It is secret even up to now. They would just see your crop doing very well and the next field not doing well.”⁶⁷ Despite *divisi* remaining an essentially private-sphere activity, mission doctrine sought to reorder this explanation for success by affirming the value of individual labor, personal responsibility and rational methods. In effect, Christians transformed *divisi* from *muti* into manure. Those who continued to rely upon *divisi* were deemed indolent or ignorant. *Divisi* became a site of contestation precisely because it dealt with attempts at human control over natural processes. The results of an emphasis upon proper fertilization/rotation would mount a clear and direct challenge to the importance of “invisible agency.”

On one hand, *nhimbe* were integral to the public life of most rural communities and therefore African congregations found ways to incorporate these long standing social relationships within their Christian doctrine. The brewing and consumption of *maheu* not only enabled converts to maintain an important communal activity, but also provided continued access to farm labor in times of peak demand. On the other hand, *divisi* was necessarily private, individual, and presented such a direct challenge to Christian doctrine that it necessitated a complete conceptual reconfiguration. Rishon Jangano expressed the essence of this change: “Those people who say that *divisi* is very important, it is that they don’t want to work. They want to say that we get these yields out of *divisi*. But to we

⁶⁶ E. Mukasa, personal interview, 4 March 1998.

⁶⁷ M. Handreck, personal interview, 12 March 1998.

Christians, *divisi* is your hands and your brains, manure and fertilizer, cultivating and ploughing. That is our *divisi*. . . .”⁶⁸

The topic is a sensitive one for most people, as no Christian could reasonably admit to its use, and many now refuse to acknowledge its existence. Yet it is perhaps in the discussion of *muti* where the modernizing Protestant idiom is most clearly found. Consider the following example:

There was a man who came around here who said, “Mr. Kawadza, can you tell me the *muti* you use for getting such big harvests?” He said, “Don’t worry. Come in the morning and I will show you.” So when he came, Kawadza took two hoes and said, “Let’s go.” The man thought they were going to dig some *muti* in the bush. They went to the field and started working. The man said, “Why are we doing this? When are you going to show me the *muti*?” Kawadza said, “Don’t worry, I will show you very soon.” Then at lunch the man asked, “Are we still going back to the fields or are you going to show me the *muti*?” Then Kawadza said, “What I have been showing you is the *muti* for a good harvest.”⁶⁹

The contrasting of *divisi* with ideas of learning, progress, and individual hard work reflect the ideology of AMEC mission Christianity very closely. As only a few other informants were willing to point out, however, some Christians continue to recognize the use and sometimes even the success of *divisi* when employed by local farmers. So it appears that even the powerful influence of mission Christianity on several generations of farmers has not completely severed this particular connection between supernatural forces and agriculture in Zimbabwe.

AMEC missionaries also discouraged converts from observing locally-determined *chisi* days. While those living in the immediate mission communities

⁶⁸ R. Jangano, personal interview, 23 April 1998.

⁶⁹ A. Kawadza and C. Kawadza, personal interview, 4 April 1998.

might more easily ignore *chisi* in favor of Sunday, Christians living further outside in the reserves found it more difficult to make such a switch. Most chiefs and mediums disapproved of any entrepreneurial excuses to avoid observance of *chisi*.⁷⁰ Some mission communities even made an effort to continue *chisi* in its original form. However, in a number of places, a meaningful compromise emerged. Because converts could not work on Sundays, certain chiefs allowed them to work on *chisi* days, but only in their garden plots and not in the larger fields. This permitted Christian farmers to maintain their pattern of worship but avoid losing a second day in their agricultural week. Confining this activity to plots away from open fields enabled chiefs to accommodate a certain type of work during *chisi*, since it did not publicly flaunt their authority. Again, this indicates the dynamic relationship of religious belief and local social concerns to the configuration of a model Christian farming household.

AMEC missionaries further attempted to intertwine the goals of creating a Christian farming ethic, community self-sufficiency, and rural stability through the introduction of an agricultural program intended specifically for churches. Ralph Felton originated the Lord's Acre Plan in the United States to support and enlarge the program of rural churches through increasing local participation. Individuals or groups would set aside part of their crop, livestock or produce for "the Lord's work." The plan encouraged participation not only by local members of the church but also from "all who receive the benefits of the church."⁷¹ Participants pledged

⁷⁰ Ranger, *Peasant Consciousness*, 44.

⁷¹ UMCA file 1463-5-2:07: R. Felton, The Lord's Acre (Asheville: Farmers Federation, 1946) 5.

some amount of crops to raise and dedicate to the plan rather than simply giving leftovers at the end of the year. This would transform the act of giving into a truly sacrificial effort. Farmers thus encountered a new sense of “God’s presence” in their daily work. Although the AMEC missionaries associated many of their goals with the spread of progressive agriculture, some certainly agreed with Felton that “Science sometimes takes away a sense of dependence upon God. Modern agriculture is rapidly becoming more scientific. This plan of a field dedicated to God deepens the spiritual life.”⁷²

One of the additional key benefits of the Lord’s Acre plan would enable the poor to pay the church through their labor and hopefully increase the likelihood of regular attendance. The plan in effect made both tithing and farming practices open to the scrutiny of the congregation, hopefully both increasing church finances and promoting better land husbandry.⁷³ In 1946, second year teacher training pupils at Hartzell Training Institute (Old Umtali mission) became the first group to implement this project with the hope that they would in turn introduce the plan when going out to teach. Upon planting, they held a dedication service with the cooperation of Rev. Chimbadzwa and eventually finished the season with a harvest offering or service. At that point they were expected to either give the vegetables to the church for sale or sell the produce themselves and give the proceeds to the

⁷² Felton 5.

⁷³ Felton 33. A survey conducted by Felton amongst U.S. pastors utilizing the plan in 1944 yields some interesting results: 61% indicated the plan taught stewardship, 58% indicated a direct contribution to increases in church budgets, 53% indicated the plan taught cooperation, 48% felt it spiritualized farm life, and 46% indicated it gave poor people a method of supporting the church. However, only 12% felt it would improve interest in missions and a mere 8% indicated that it improved agricultural practices.

church.⁷⁴ Theological students at the Old Umtali Biblical Institute also planned a similar project to operate in conjunction with their individual gardens. The AMEC agricultural department hoped that by incorporating these elements in the training of key church personnel, the concept would spread to other people around the mission community.

Although some of these cooperative programs ran successfully, even providing the resident pastor with several bags of maize annually, the Lord's Acre could often suffer from a shortage of regular participants. Attendance at some sites fluctuated according to the activity at hand, suggesting a particular valuation or prestige for different types of agricultural labor. As Doris Kanyimo remembered, "You would find that a good number of people would offer to plough that land for free. When you are asked to come and plant the maize, nobody is going to be there. You are asked to come and cultivate or asked to come and put fertilizer. But then you will find that people, they don't all come."⁷⁵ The status ascribed to ploughing, especially for the Lord's Acre, certainly inspired such participation, but it seems likely that the gendered division of farm labor in most households also influenced turnout for these events.

The most regular and time-consuming aspects of small-scale agriculture in Zimbabwe have usually been the domain of women. Much of the 'agricultural package' which United Methodist missionaries professed--adoption of the plough, crop rotation and use of fertilizer--only increased these demands. Performing tasks

⁷⁴ OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1946) 246.

⁷⁵ D. Kanyimo, personal interview, 4 March 1998.

such as planting, cultivation or fertilization in the Lord's Acre would have to occur nearly simultaneously with the domestic fields. Much of this activity had to occur within a limited seasonal window. In those households already experiencing a shortage of labor during peak demand periods, women necessarily gave work in an essentially communal plot lower priority. By their timing in the agricultural cycle, volunteering for ploughing or harvesting allowed more church members the flexibility to devote time for the Lord's Acre. But when the regular, everyday tasks of mid-season competed for women's time, even the powerful metaphors employed by the Lord's Acre programs were often not enough to ensure regular or continuous community participation.

The long-term emphasis upon generating social change through agricultural means, which already characterized AMEC missions in colonial Zimbabwe by 1910, only intensified in the period leading up to the Second World War. The isolationism and depression that gripped much of American society in these years decreased financial support, ensuring that self-reliance would remain the watchword of foreign missions. Tension between evangelical and activist missionary personalities often emerged in the irregular funding of station farming operations. Some clearly felt that their mission should remain more strictly confined to the actual conversion process. Any social benefits of a missionary presence were of secondary importance to spreading the Gospel. Others argued for the potential social changes that new agricultural methods might effect, reflecting the broad trend amongst American Protestant missions towards provision of social and educational services. But despite such differences, for the rural AMEC stations, economic

necessity normally reinforced the centrality of agricultural productivity in missionary discourse. These issues of self-sufficiency receive further attention in Chapters 3 and 4.

AMEC missionaries promoted a specific farming agenda, citing the spiritual benefits associated with the *gospel of the plough* and the Lord's Acre program. As in their broader experience with mission Christianity, converts did not simply accept a new “package” of cultivation methods and concepts. Except on their tenant farms, missionaries had little actual control over the various forms that this new knowledge took in individual fields. Differential access to land and labor resources left most Christian households unable or unwilling to uniformly apply all the techniques of AMEC progressive agriculture. Farmers sought to incorporate those agricultural practices or technologies that might improve their output, yet also fit their immediate production constraints. Christian farmers also adapted the AMEC agricultural message to better balance the new elements of their individual identity with existing social relationships and economic conditions. They created a new form of *nhimbe* in order to reconcile the necessities of community participation in farming with a church prohibition against alcohol. A particularly Christian acknowledgment of *chisi* allowed many communities to avoid an outright confrontation over this symbol of political and ritual authority. AMEC farmers even sought to reconceptualize the established rationality of *divisi* as a supernatural production aid, configuring instead a new Christian *divisi* of rational methods and natural self-discipline.

CHAPTER 3

THEIR SOIL IS GOING TO GEHENNA: AMEC MISSIONS AND STATE POLICIES FOR AFRICAN AGRICULTURE

This chapter examines the relationship between mission communities and the state in the realm of agriculture. Over the period 1939-62, increasing concerns over soil erosion prompted a substantial state effort to transform African agricultural practices. The justification for such state intervention "lay in the belief that peasant agriculture was backward and inefficient, and that through technical development, production levels, and hence living standards, could be raised in the reserves."¹ Early attempts at simply moving African farmers away from swidden cultivation methods evolved into *centralization*, the establishment of consolidated villages to facilitate increased government authority over soil conservation measures. Programs to individualize land and stock holdings under the Native Land Husbandry Act (NLHA) later emerged from a belief that the prevailing African tenure system lay at the root of conservation difficulties.² Elements of this broad state initiative had their origin partly in missionary ideals and education. Closer government attention to mission lands also necessitated a reevaluation of their utilization. As state agricultural

¹ Drinkwater 288.

² However, doubts remained as to the wisdom of encouraging such a process. Some Native Commissioners apparently realized that this trend might eventually result in stronger political and economic competition from the African population. As early as 1920, the CNC report stated: "the tribal system will gradually disappear, but no sudden breaking down of such a system should be attempted." J.C. Mutambirwa, The Rise of Settler Power in Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), 1898-1923 (London: Associated University Press, 1980) 151.

policies increasingly moved from persuasion towards coercion, mission communities often experienced this heightened government intervention in different ways from their neighbors.

Many areas in Southern Africa experienced a substantial transformation of conservationist thinking during the 1930s. Even colonial officials, previously concerned only with the sustainability of European farming practices, now perceived widespread degradation on lands farmed by Africans. By the middle of the decade, a variety of government experts argued that African agricultural methods were at the center of a severe environmental crisis. Perceptions of soil deterioration and the faltering of African subsistence production also generated wider governmental policy concerns. Satisfying continued settler demands for land could only occur if the reserves maintained their capability to absorb an increasing African population. Forthcoming government policies sought to “develop the native reserves so as to enable them to carry a larger population, and so avoid, as far as possible, the necessity for acquisition of more land for native occupation.”³

This new outlook was evident in the minority government’s fear that an impending ecological disaster would coincide with their implementation of a racially-based land apportionment scheme. In 1925, the Morris Carter Commission had issued its findings, recommending demarcation of separate African and European purchase areas. To reduce friction over land tenure issues, the Commission suggested eliminating Africans’ right to own land in areas of their choosing. Africans would no

³ R. Palmer, Land and Racial Domination in Rhodesia (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977) 202. The same CNC report for 1932 goes on to state, “it is plain that we must take more positive control, if we are to see an increase, and not a reduction in the life-supporting capacity of our native reserves.”

longer have legal rights to occupy land in areas designated for Europeans, forcing them onto reserve or purchase area land. They were to own land only within eighty-one Native Areas (later called Native Purchase Areas) which usually abutted existing reserves.⁴ But the reserves remained virtually unchanged in acreage, as the government maintained that enough land had already been allocated for communal tenure.⁵ Local reports of overcrowding, erosion, and pasture degradation soon followed implementation of the Land Apportionment Act (1930). Government officials directed their resultant anxiety into policies that would increasingly coerce Africans to transform their productive practices. Planners hoped the new system would result in higher-yielding, more intensive cultivation on reserve lands, thus ensuring sufficient agricultural production and avoiding the transfer of land from European-designated areas.

William Beinart has argued that state conservation concerns in Southern Africa originated in response to the perceived difficulties facing settler agriculture.⁶ Recognizing the frequent rural opposition to development programs, he queries, “how did governments arrive at schemes which stimulated such hostility and why did they persist, with sometimes crusading zeal, in trying to implement them?”⁷ To discern local officials' motivations and how they shaped specific projects, he relies upon an examination of conservation ideology across the region. He seeks to place the roots

⁴ B.N. Floyd, “Land Apportionment in Southern Rhodesia,” People and Land In Africa South of the Sahara, ed. R.M. Prothero (London: Oxford University Press, 1972) 234.

⁵ Ranger, African Voice, 113.

⁶ W. Beinart, “Soil Erosion, Conservationism and Ideas About Development: a Southern African Exploration,” Journal of Southern African Studies 11 (1984) 52-83.

⁷ Beinart, “Soil Erosion,” 52-53.

and content of conservation ideology within the larger framework of state intervention. Beinart maintains that an exploration of conservationist thought is crucial to understanding processes of state intervention in agriculture beyond the mere technical aspects. He avoids suggesting that these ideas were the determinant factor in state activities, since such notions interacted with other political and socio-economic forces. But because conservation efforts remained based upon methods drawn from settler farms, the ideas which eventually formed the core of state policies for peasant agriculture emanated from settler experiences.

Ian Phimister subsequently criticized Beinart's emphasis on the importance of conservationist ideas.⁸ Instead, he views conservation policy evolving as a state response to political and economic pressures. Cultivation of tobacco for export expanded so swiftly that by the early 1940's Southern Rhodesia lost its self-sufficiency in foodstuffs. Government marketing and production agencies realized that increased food production would necessitate a general improvement in farming operations. Phimister also attests to the influence of converging settler and industrial interests.⁹ Segregationist land policies, coupled with other economic factors, had increased the population of reserves, resulting in declining yields and soil erosion. Simultaneously, the development of secondary industry generated new requirements for a large, regular workforce. Over the long term, these industries would increasingly require a strong and diverse internal market. Phimister therefore sees the convergence of these factors

⁸ I. Phimister, "Discourse and the Discipline of Historical Context: Conservationism and Ideas About Development in Southern Rhodesia, 1930-1950," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 12, 2 (1986) 263-275.

⁹ Phimister, "Discourse and the Discipline of Historical Context," 270.

as motivation for expanded government attempts to control peasant production processes and stabilize rural populations. Thus, he argues that conservationist ideas were initially implemented in relation to peasant agriculture and challenges the importance Beinart places on conservationism's role in affecting state policy.¹⁰ While Phimister is likely correct about the motivations behind implementation of coercive land husbandry policies, the popularity of conservationist views during this era ensured that authorities then channeled many of their social engineering efforts towards agricultural improvement schemes.

Beginning in 1927, the Department of Native Agriculture (DNA) had dispersed trained African agricultural demonstrators into the reserves to promote changes in cultivation habits through persuasive example. In some areas, initial alliances between farmers and demonstrators emerged from church connections. Oftentimes, the demonstrators themselves had been selected from amongst the mission-educated and “naturally sought to work with similarly progressive men.”¹¹ The departmental director, E.D. Alvord, hoped that demonstration plots would encourage surrounding communities to emulate a model of successful intensive production that included crop rotation, manuring, winter ploughing, and physical protection of the soil. Alvord based this scheme on experiences during his tenure until 1919 as an American Foreign Board agricultural missionary at Mount Silinda. Ten years later he wrote, “It is our aim to teach them how to grow on one acre the

¹⁰ Phimister, “Discourse and the Discipline of Historical Context,” 263.

¹¹ Ranger, *Peasant Consciousness*, 62. See also J. McGregor, “Woodland Resources: Ecology, Policy and Ideology - an Historical Case Study of Woodland Use in Shurugwi Communal Area, Zimbabwe,” dissertation, Loughborough University of Technology, 1991.

quantity of crops they now grow on ten. . .our policy is one of conservation. . .and intensive farming on small areas.”¹²

Consequently, a program originally developed on a mission station became official government policy, was then frequently disseminated by staff with a mission education, and made many of its earliest inroads amongst mission adherents. So it should not be surprising that much of the agricultural propaganda generated by the DNA during Alvord’s administration contained overt references to Christian doctrine and experience. Alvord long maintained that properly cared for, smaller acreages, were actually the Christian ideal. He warned that “a man who ploughs and plants more land than he is able to cultivate, weed and look after properly, is greedy and wasteful and is not working together with the Lord. . . .”¹³ This commonality in missionary and government discourse eventually resulted in accusations against both for promoting intensive agriculture simply to make segregated land apportionment somehow more palatable in the reserves.

The first Native Reserves Commission had issued reports in 1914-1915 after extensive travel throughout the country. Their new demarcations generally replaced the best land in the reserves with more marginal areas.¹⁴ The resultant insecurity

¹² Ranger, *Peasant Consciousness*, 93. But only two years later, the NC Goromonzi commented, “the precepts of the demonstrators are not being taken to heart. Once the first flush of enthusiasm is over, the painful fact that better farming methods mean more work is brought home, and interest quickly wanes.” GSPR: Annual Report of the Secretary for Native Affairs and the CNC (1931) 4.

¹³ E.D. Alvord, “Soro Chena Says,” *Harvester*, 19 March 1952: 6. Some scholars have even accused Alvord of seeking to “destroy the validity of indigenous agricultural practices in order to more effectively convert Africans to Christianity.” S. Moyo and H. Page, “Western Hegemony over African Agriculture in Southern Rhodesia and its Continuing Threat to Food Security in Independent Zimbabwe,” Santa Cruz: University of California Conference on Varieties of Sustainability, 1991.

¹⁴ R. Palmer, *Aspects of Rhodesian Land Policy 1890-1936* (Salisbury: Central African Historical Association, 1968) 31.

prompted many Africans to reject agricultural improvement instruction for fear of losing the improved land to further readjustments. Farmers in these reserves became justifiably suspicious of government motives for promoting conservation works. Fears of losing their land once the agricultural potential had been improved generated numerous rumors across the reserves. As late as 1944, one report stated,

some of the Natives, particularly those with a smattering of education, are very suspicious of the motives behind the present drive by the Native Agriculture department to improve the productive capacity of Native lands. They fear that any success will be a reason for depriving them of portions of the Reserves set aside for them or a ground for refusing their demands, which are insistent, for an extension of the Reserves.¹⁵

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Alvord denied that African farming constituted a simplistic system. While he claimed a casual observer might only recognize the outward appearance of basic methods, a closer examination would reveal a complicated set of ritual practices that accompanied them. But for Alvord, this recognition of the social and spiritual complexities in local agricultural systems by no means generated even grudging approval. Rather, he viewed the African farmer as a victim of superstition and dread since “every operation in his daily life of tilling the soil was related to spirit worship, taboos and superstitious customs.”¹⁶ These included the performance of rituals to ensure good germination and crop protection, as well as the use of *divisi* to promote fertility and increased yields. Even worse, these ceremonies frequently involved beer production and consumption. In addition to encouraging immorality, Alvord saw beer brewing as

¹⁵ Palmer, Land and Racial Domination, 219.

¹⁶ E.D. Alvord, “The Gospel of the Plough and Superstition,” Harvester, 8 September 1948: 3.

as waste of valuable food resources. Moreover, he considered beer drinks as a severe constraint upon the adoption of new techniques and the effective utilization of available labor supplies. For the day after such ceremonies, “they went out to the lands with bloodshot eyes and weary bodies to scratch the soil with their crude native hoes and scatter the spirit blest seed.”¹⁷ Alvord therefore considered it essential to make use of “expert knowledge” in substituting the *gospel of the plough* for local religious and agricultural idioms.

Although many government officials linked the activities of missions with social change, Alvord’s personal background led him to place more emphasis than most on the positive impacts of Christianity. Like many Protestant missionaries of his generation, he believed that the spirit could not truly be changed without an accompanying transformation of mind and physical being. Thus, it became essential for his Department and the various missionary bodies to work hand in hand. He considered it “a useless waste of time for missions to try to win their souls to the Kingdom of God unless they also teach them the gospel of the plough.”¹⁸ For converts could not long remain Christians if they returned to an agricultural life filled with the influences of “superstition and ignorance.” Alvord also placed substantial emphasis on the material improvements necessary for a proper Christian lifestyle. Low income levels on the reserves were therefore cause for great concern. Rural people would never become real Christians unless “we educate them out of

¹⁷ E.D. Alvord, “The Gospel of the Plough and Superstition,” Harvester, 8 September 1948: 3.

¹⁸ E.D. Alvord, “The Gospel of the Plough and the Kingdom of God,” Harvester, 3 November 1948: 4.

their environment, create in them wants and desires that will lift them up out of the sea of superstition and ignorance that engulfs them.”¹⁹

Evidently, Alvord did not consider the mere fact of religious conversion as a sufficient impetus towards better land husbandry. He shared the concern of many missionaries that converts might only temporarily adopt portions of Christian doctrine. If traditional religion had accounted for the success of agriculture through purely spiritual explanations, might not African converts simply transfer this explanatory power to God and thus continue to avoid personal responsibility for their failures? Alvord thereby stressed the biblical tenet that “faith without works is dead.” Since prayers without action were useless, the *gospel of the plough* meant hard work: “we must combine praying with hoeing if we want our prayers to be answered.”²⁰ Although he stressed the important role of missions in extending these concepts among the population, Alvord could also sharply criticize those stations that failed to live up to his Departmental standards. In 1951, he agreed heartily with the assessment of a mission farm by one American observer, who concluded that “their souls may be going to Heaven, but their soil is going to Gehenna.”²¹

From the outset of Alvord’s efforts to maintain soil fertility on arable plots, DNA demonstrators consistently recommended green manuring and a crop rotation

¹⁹ E.D. Alvord, “The Gospel of the Plough and the Kingdom of God,” Harvester, 3 November 1948: 4.

²⁰ E.D. Alvord, “The Gospel of the Plough,” Harvester, 28 July 1948: 2.

²¹ E.D. Alvord, “Soro Chena Says,” Harvester, 24 January 1951: 2. Despite sharing similar ideas about the transformation of African agriculture, when Rev. George Roberts compared their long careers, he explained that “a person with one thousand pounds a year, and the native department police force to help put it over, can run a larger show than the old teacher did on his 1,5/- per month.” UMCA George Roberts Papers: G. Roberts, letter, 25 August 1951.

that included legumes.²² But many people continued to reject rotation, preferring higher-earning maize monoculture. As Bessant has noted, most peasants were farming to make money, not to preserve the environment.²³ Alvord had noticed this by 1934, even complaining to his superiors that “the greatest handicap to our efforts to introduce better methods of tillage among reserve Natives is the lack of marketing facilities. In many areas it is impossible for Natives to sell for cash. . . [which] imposes a hand to mouth existence upon him under which he cannot progress.”²⁴ In conjunction with demonstration work, a resettlement policy began under the aegis of *centralization*. In order to permit increased carrying capacity of both humans and cattle, reserves would be delineated between residential, arable, and grazing areas. The plan consolidated and fenced arable lands to prevent damage from cattle. Following harvests, cattle were to browse on crop residues and uneaten herbage in the arable sections, giving grazing lands a rest.²⁵ Surveyors reorganized residential sections to permit future development of water supplies and transportation.

The plan transformed villages containing dispersed clusters of households into straight lines of homes, facing each other along the boundaries between arable and grazing areas. This pattern provided centralization with its common name, *maraini*

²² H. Weinmann, Agricultural Research and Development in Southern Rhodesia, 1924-50 (Salisbury: Government Printer, 1975) 204.

²³ L. Bessant, “Coercive Development: Peasant Economy, Politics, and Land in the Chiweshe Reserve, Colonial Zimbabwe, 1940-66,” dissertation, Yale University, 1987, 93.

²⁴ GPSR: Annual Report of the Secretary for Native Affairs and the Chief Native Commissioner (1934) 18.

²⁵ Weinmann 207. Centralization frequently hindered manuring, as pastures and kraals no longer adjoined arable plots.

(the lines).²⁶ In some areas, missionaries recognized African opposition to this mandatory reorganization, but supported its implementation on the grounds that it grouped potential converts together and made them easier to evangelize. Yet at certain junctures, centralization exposed the conflict between missionary ideals of rational order and their idealized vision of rural African life. In 1942, the Southern Rhodesia Missionary Conference requested of the Secretary for Native Affairs that “the typically European and unaesthetic street form of centralization in native reserves not be insisted upon.”²⁷

Centralization occurred within the larger context of government attempts to implement the Land Apportionment Act of 1930. In designating specific areas for European and African occupation, one of the Act’s requirements stipulated that European farms could only contain those Africans in direct employ of the farm owner. All others had to take up residence in the reserves. The impact of this relocation policy on mission programs could be serious. Some schools and congregations drew most of their people from the families living on European-owned farms. For example, AMEC missionaries at Arnoldine near Headlands watched as surrounding European farm populations decreased under the new law. Declining enrollment at the primary school endangered its existence and church authorities suggested displaced people move onto nearby Weya Reserve. This would at least allow continued educational contact and congregational stability.

²⁶ Bessant 69.

²⁷ NAZ file S RH179: Southern Rhodesia Missionary Conference, Proceedings (Salisbury, 1942) 8. See also Zachrisson 317.

Mission officials feared the scattering of congregations would result in a reversal of their educational and evangelistic achievements.

Even prior to actual implementation of the Act, its effect could be felt in mission communities as people suspected they would not be staying for much longer. This uncertainty made extended planning and building upkeep quite difficult. So although mission farms and tenants did not face the same official policies as the reserves, broader government land policy did impact the mission system. Rev. H.E. Taylor remarked, “It looks as if a reserve is the only area in which every native will be driven to stay. What will happen to our schools and churches on the farms?”²⁸ In 1940, the Game Valley farm school shut down completely due to the removal of people from European areas. Some missionaries questioned any expansion of activities until this period of government-mandated resettlement concluded. Others expressed concern over the changing situation in the reserves, as populations expanded quickly and arable land became less available. Missionary criticism of these official land policies usually remained understated, however, when it appeared at all. In 1945, for instance, Rev. T.A. O’Farrell revealed his own views, stating, “Every good plan for developing the reserves and

²⁸ OMA: The Methodist Episcopal Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1938) 217. Edgington also maintains that the 1930’s land squeeze resulted in overcrowded reserves, causing more significant levels of tenant occupation on stations like Arnoldine and Nyakatsapa as opposed to Murewa or Old Mutare. While availability of land in the reserves certainly affected the attractiveness of a mission residence, decisions concerning the acreages available for tenant occupation remained largely in missionary hands. For example, the majority of tenants at Arnoldine originated not in the surrounding reserves, but came instead from an area in the highlands following their eviction by a timber company. M. Handreck, personal interview, 11 March 1998.

conserving the land should have our hearty approval. But some of us would welcome a bit more liberality in making land available to the Africans.”²⁹

Other state programs in the countryside also drew missionary attention. In a further effort to re-engineer rural society, Alvord’s department proceeded in developing irrigation projects for resettlement by African plotholders. Such projects concentrated rural populations on designated individual plots, usually between two and five hectares in size. Missionaries quickly noted the multiple impacts of these developments for their own endeavors. E.L. Sells advised, as with centralization, “these opportunities for reaching more people must not be neglected.”³⁰ Yet the relocation process did stress or even fragment labor networks that had previously evolved from church connections. Irrigation projects changed patterns of influence and power as plotholders came under the more direct authority of government irrigation or land development officers. While irrigated farming frequently meant additional economic opportunity, other missionaries feared widespread material accumulation might turn interests away from the spiritual. On the effect of these projects in Mutambara district, Rev. George Roberts wrote, “their responsibilities to the government and irrigation managers is such that the building of a church or school is a new and different proposition.”³¹

²⁹ OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1945) 104.

³⁰ OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1939) 340.

³¹ OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1944) 25.

The state-sponsored irrigation projects also tended to create a new form of community, as they drew together households from over a wide geographic area. Thus, these communities distanced many plotholders from familiar institutions of political authority. In March 1943, Mutambara demonstrator H.D. Sibiya complained, “there is no proper leader [such] as a chief to give a control to these people, for each wants to rule himself. . .these people cannot go forward in the work, for they always object to some instructions by means of saying ‘we know’.”³² This attitude may have arisen from several background events. The government-subsidized construction of irrigation works at Mutambara began in 1931. However, irrigation on reserve lands there originated prior to any government involvement, initially based on the experience gained by a number of former commercial farm workers. They headed construction of the system upon which the Department of Native Agriculture then expanded as part of its broader scheme for Manicaland.

By 1934, the project furrow irrigated nearly 100 acres for the use of twenty plotholders.³³ Across the river, the mission grounds had included irrigated fields since 1912. So when the state scheme got under way, many residents of Mutambara reserve already had either direct or indirect familiarity with irrigated farming techniques. This led, rather naturally, towards a certain resistance to the recommendations of the young demonstrator only just empowered to oversee their plots. Such resistance continued, causing the Mutambara Land Development Officer (LDO) R. Sheppy to wonder, “Why only this project should give us trouble,

³² NAZ file S160/IP/5-104/1/50: LDO Mutambara Reserve to DNA, March 1943.

³³ NAZ file S160/IP/5-104/1/50: ANC Melsetter to NC Chippinga, 15 November 1934.

is something I cannot get to the bottom of - is it the mission influence or is it the chief?"³⁴ Certainly both would have difficulties contending with elements of the state's expanding land management policies.

An extended struggle over riparian rights on the Mutambara project would expose the competing agendas of reserve farmers, missionaries, and state officials. State officials initially hoped the Manicaland irrigation schemes would boost productivity in the reserves, alleviating some of the pressure to make more arable land available for an increasing African population. For the Mutambara project, this would entail expanding upon the existing furrow and incorporating its' users under the authority of the Department of Native Agriculture. Not only did this transfer place plotholder methods under a demonstrator's scrutiny, it meant that irrigation water became subject to annual user fees and limitations. Even vegetable gardens now began to draw a fee assessment.

To avoid these restrictions, some plotholders attempted to maintain rights to arable lands outside the project, intending irrigated areas for supplemental income or as safeguards against drought. This reluctance to focus solely on irrigated lands for household income ironically led some officials to conclude that these farmers could access too much land outside the project. Other plotholders tried a different approach to promote economic security. Officials complained about the difficulties in marketing grain from these projects when farmers held crops back, hoping for a subsequent rise in prices. This eventually led the Provincial Agriculturalist for Manicaland to request further control over production on the projects in order to

³⁴ NAZ file S160/IP/1-4: LDO Mutambara Reserve (R. Sheppy), Monthly Report, March 1945.

fulfill predicted amounts for sale.³⁵ Regular participation in maintenance activities also became mandatory on the government projects. Violators would be subject to fines. But at Mutambara, people were surprised when they were fined and said, "how can we be fined when the irrigation is ours?"³⁶ These additional requirements emerged as a source of tension, particularly during drier years. Plotholders evidently went on strike over increased water rates and halted work on an expansion project in 1942. Drought conditions generated further resistance in 1947, as rates (assessed per irrigated acre) were set to increase even as the furrow emitted only a trickle.³⁷

Indeed, the amount of water available to the project furrow had already caused official concern years earlier, reflecting a wider tension between the mission and reserve farmers over land use rights. As early as 1939, the Assistant Native Commissioner (ANC) for Melsetter district had written Alvord, stating that the intake for the turbine powering Mutambara mission adversely affected the reserve farmers' water flow, as the mission only returned the water at a point below the reserve system intake. Alvord seemed to doubt this conclusion, instead speculating that sufficient flow still existed to irrigate several hundred additional reserve acres.³⁸ But he went on to outline the possibilities for an additional furrow to return mission water above the reserve intake. The issue of adequate water for the reserve

³⁵ NAZ file S160/100/1/50: Director of Native Agriculture to Marketing Officer for Native Agriculture, 28 April 1950.

³⁶ E. Sisimayi, personal interview, 25 February 1998.

³⁷ NAZ file S160/IP/5-104/1/50: Agriculturalist for Natives to CNC, 30 July 1942; LDO Mutambara Reserve to Director of Native Agriculture, 27 December 1946.

³⁸ NAZ file S 160/IP/1-4: Director of Native Agriculture (E.D. Alvord) to CNC, February 1939.

plotholders remained unresolved and in early 1941, Alvord did attempt to obtain official permission from Rev. George Roberts for the necessary diversion furrow across the mission farm. He emphasized the potential benefits for the mission, including longterm possibilities for extended irrigation acreage and the control of water flow through an erosion-prone area of the farm. State funds would pay for the excavation and construction.³⁹

In July of 1942, Alvord submitted a progress report on expanding the Mutambara furrow which declared the situation stalled. Attempts to collect in advance the recently increased water rentals met with plotholder counter-demands that the government owed compensation to those who had built the original irrigation furrow. The issue of the mission turbine intake was left unresolved. Another rate hike in 1946, at a time when reserve farmers were complaining about lack of water in their furrow, escalated the situation. Project plotholders claimed their furrow contained insufficient water prior to the rains, and since they did not receive the chief benefit of irrigation (access to water in the dry season), rents certainly should not increase. As a result, the mission irrigation system would face closer scrutiny from both neighboring farmers and government officials.

This attention naturally focused on the turbine intake, still extracting water above the reserve intake and returning it below. In most seasons, the normal range of rainfall totals seemingly produced flow rates sufficient to supply the reserve plots, despite the placement of the mission extraction point. But in January 1947, the early rains ceased and a severe drought hit. As any promise of their dryland

³⁹ NAZ file S160/IP/5-104/1/50: Agriculturalist for Natives (E.D. Alvord) to G. Roberts, 17 January 1941.

crops evaporated, plotholders placed their hopes on the irrigation system. The reduced flow rate quickly emerged as source of discontent, especially since it occurred amid debate over another proposed hike in water rents. In February, the LDO Mutambara finally approached the mission to request a temporary shutdown "in order that the flow of water into the project furrow might be sufficient to save existing crops, which at that time were in very poor shape."⁴⁰ This official concern continued as the local water supply faced expanding demands.

In July, P.W. Coetzee applied for water rights to irrigate eighty acres on his nearby Quaggershoek Farm. The NC Melsetter protested that further grants to water from the Umvumvumvu river would jeopardize the Mutambara project. Once again, he mentions the mission turbine in connection with this water shortage and argues for the reserve project to take its full allotment prior to diversion for the turbine. One month later, the Director of Native Agriculture also adopted this position in a report to the Chief Native Commissioner. Mission water use had curtailed dry season irrigation on the project plots. The mission's right to irrigate 200 acres did not come into question, only their regular operation of a turbine for electrical power and milling. But it appears mission use alone prompted his recommendation that "any further water rights on this furrow will seriously affect the rights of plotholders on the Mutambara Reserve irrigation project."⁴¹ It is not clear whether Coetzee obtained his water at that juncture, but the issue of mission and reserve water rights would again remain unresolved. In September 1951,

⁴⁰ NAZ file S160/IP/5-104/1/50: NC Melsetter to Director of Native Agriculture, 20 March 1947.

⁴¹ NAZ file S 160/IP/1-4: NC Melsetter to PNC Umtali, 3 July 1947; Director of Native Agriculture to CNC, 14 August 1947.

officials measured the flow rate in the project furrow at one cubic foot per second. This was less than half of their allotted 2.5 cubic feet per second.

At a 1952 plotholders meeting attended by the Provincial Native Commissioner, the mission representative finally agreed to construct a flow control gate, enabling the reserve furrow to extract its allotment prior to any tertiary uses (such as a turbine).⁴² It had already been over twelve years since the issue first appeared in official reports, and delays still stressed the multiple relations between peasants, mission, and the state. Plotholders resented state demands of increased water rents for an unreliable source. Reserve farmers blamed the mission intake system for the situation, and government demonstrators agreed with their assessment. Certainly, the reluctance of mission authorities to address the issue firmly created problems for both plotholders and development officers. Since the mission fell under the ‘European’ land classification, DNA officers faced a dilemma in attempting to respond to community pressure towards an area outside their immediate authority. Demonstrators felt the consequences of their superiors’ inability to resolve this issue, as their role in the community increasingly came into question.

Not surprisingly, Chief Mutambara’s relations with mission and state officials grew strained during this period. Part of this undoubtedly came in an effort to maintain authority despite state interference in land use and allocation decisions. In 1938, he apparently did not encourage plotholders to cooperate with their

⁴² NAZ file S2583/612/2: NRB Agenda, April 1952. See also NAZ file S160 AGR 4/6/51: Provincial Agriculturalist Report, December 1951. D.A. Robinson comments, “this clears up matters which have given a lot of difficulty for many years.”

demonstrator, leaving many "very suspicious" of government efforts.⁴³ Some farmers rejected official attempts to demarcate their plots, resulting in fines for ploughing beyond the marking beacons. By September of 1943, demonstrator Sibiya again reported, "I want the authorities to know that there is a lot of dictating. The most troublest [sic] thing with these people is of wanting to teach the demonstrator, not wanting the demonstrator to teach them."⁴⁴ Chiefly resistance to encroaching state power mirrored the attitudes of those in the community who resented extending government control over irrigation plots.

On occasion, this confrontation could also spill over into the realm of social authority. Like their evangelical counterparts, the agricultural message of government demonstrators came wrapped in a broader package of ideas. Modern agricultural methods were the means to transform the entire rural outlook. Demonstrators frequently lectured on dress, hygiene, and sanitation issues. It was during one such situation in 1945 that one demonstrator overstepped his role and came into direct conflict with Chief Mutambara. At a meeting attended by the Director of Native Agriculture, the Chief suddenly had a tin of rubbish brought forward. According to the testimony that followed, the demonstrator had visited the kraal of Gumba and, after inspecting the premises, ordered the wife to clean the outside yard. Upon her refusal, he filled the rubbish tin three times, allegedly dumping its contents inside the wife's hut.⁴⁵ While the Director attempted to

⁴³ NAZ file S160/IP/5-104/1/50: Agriculturalist for the Instruction of Natives to CNC, 21 December 1938. See also Ranger, Peasant Consciousness, 73.

⁴⁴ NAZ file S160/IP/5-104/1/50: LDO Mutambara Reserve to DNA, March 1943.

⁴⁵ NAZ file S 160/IP/1-4: Director of Native Agriculture to NC Melsetter, 21 September 1945.

deflect the Chief's anger towards the district administration, he did feel compelled to publicly reprimand the demonstrator in question. In creatively confronting senior government officials with the actions of a subordinate, Chief Mutambara sought to clarify the limits of demonstrator authority and uphold his own position as the main arbiter of local social behavior. This led rather quickly to some area officials characterizing him as an agitator.⁴⁶

The projects also created quite a mixture of Christian denominations. State regulations that had long governed the missionary presence in colonial Zimbabwe granted virtual monopolies to various churches, preventing extensive overlap in mission activities. Different denominations were prohibited from building mission schools within a three-mile radius of one another. The AMEC administered the schools on both Mutambara and Nyanyadzi projects. But the three-mile rule came under attack on the irrigation projects as plotholders' different faiths caused friction with the Methodist educational facility. By 1950, the situation had reached a point where state officials also began to question the longstanding policy. They considered the potential multiplicity of schools on the projects untenable and viewed a non-denominational school as the only alternative. The Melsetter district office became aware of disputes over education at both sites, noting "the certain amount of re-action. . .which is starting against mission schools."⁴⁷ In creating essentially new community structures, based on specific agricultural pursuits

⁴⁶ NAZ file S160/IP/5-104/1/50: LDO Mutambara Reserve (G.M. Law), Monthly Report, January 1947.

⁴⁷ NAZ file S160/IP/5-104/1/50: ANC Melsetter to PNC Manicaland, 24 October 1950.

(irrigation), state policy seemingly threatened the existing delineation of mission education and influence in the reserves.

Meanwhile, the Department of Native Agriculture eventually began to lose faith in its' potential to effect significant change in the reserves through programs based on persuasion or example. While officials recognized that "the ultimate forces of agricultural advance are immaterial," it seemed agricultural education alone could not change public attitudes. By 1949, a report commissioned by the Minister of Agriculture advised "it is now generally accepted that the better agricultural use of land by natives in the reserves cannot be hoped for unless there are certain firm requirements to ensure good practices and to preclude what is harmful."⁴⁸ Africans farming in European areas also created concern amongst policymakers. Widespread farm tenancy, under arrangements disparagingly termed *kaffir farming*, continued to frustrate state-sponsored conservation efforts.

Growing concerns over agriculture and soil conservation had initially led to the appointment of a Natural Resources Commission in 1938. The subsequent Commission report chastises European landholders for their concentration on receiving rent while remaining indifferent to increasing land degradation. Many landlords remained reluctant to enforce conservation measures, apparently fearing the loss of rental income and/or their labor force. Similarly, the report mentions difficulties with missionaries who failed to protect the soil and took "no steps to

⁴⁸ Southern Rhodesia, Report to the Minister of Agriculture and Lands on Agricultural Teaching, Research, and Advisory Work (Salisbury: Government Printer, 1949) 6-27.

arrest the all too obvious destruction arising from the agricultural and pastoral methods practised by the Natives.”⁴⁹

The resultant Natural Resources Act of 1941 introduced an approach that tried to improve European and African conservation practices by compulsory measures. Even Alvord, the long-time promoter of extension through demonstration, had apparently abandoned his original hopes for the African farmer.

In 1943, he stated to the Secretary of Native Affairs,

we have wasted our time for seventeen years in conducting agricultural demonstration work in the native reserves. Demonstration plot work has been most successful. Average yields on plots have been ten times the yields on ordinary native lands. The lessons to be learned have been preached to the people at “before harvest” meetings every year for the past sixteen years. Yet the vast majority of those who have attended these meetings year after year have made no change in their slipshod tillage methods. It is now quite evident that they will never change without compulsion and control.⁵⁰

Additional concern in the newly-configured Department of Native Agriculture (DNA) over the relationship between cattle, erosion, and pasture degradation soon led to an assessment of livestock carrying capacities on the reserves. Between 1946-1948, more than one million head of cattle left the reserves under government supervised sales programs. Just as centralization sought to control access to arable

⁴⁹ Southern Rhodesia, Report of the Commission to enquire into the Preservation etc. of the Natural Resources of the Colony (Salisbury: Government Printer, 1939) 13.

⁵⁰ NAZ file S515: Secretary for Native Affairs, Plan for the Development and Regeneration of the Colony's Native Reserves and Areas, and for the Administration, Control and Supervision of the Land Occupied by Natives (Salisbury: Government Printer, 1943) Annexure 4.

lands through demarcating standardized areas, mandatory destocking attempted to control utilization of grazing areas by limiting stockholding rights.⁵¹

Interventionist government programs would influence internal mission policy, especially on the tenant farms at Nyakatsapa and Arnoldine. Shared assumptions about the state of African agricultural practices tended to ensure mission support of government ‘improvement’ efforts and sublimate any concerns about their suitability for specific local conditions. In 1947, Rev. M.E. Culver enthusiastically described Nyakatsapa as “an old community being exposed to a new idea. The farm is one half mapped with a view to centralization of the living and farming areas.”⁵² Missionaries began to insist that teachers at reserve schools follow the recommendations of the local agricultural demonstrator. At Mutambara mission, the reserve demonstrator frequently visited teachers’ plots at the behest of the principal. Some teachers held lands within the mission and the adjacent reserve. By the mid-1940s, they faced fairly consistent missionary pressure to “become, willingly or otherwise, ‘cooperators’ with the reserve’s land programme and attend the demonstrator’s lectures.”⁵³ Increasing missionary emphasis upon the construction of erosion-preventing contour ridges closely echoed state propaganda efforts. But as Ezekiel Makunike remembered, “that was mainly in the villages, in the reserves. [At Nyakatsapa] that thing was not enforced because it came from the demonstrators and they didn’t have any power. It was only [for] those people who

⁵¹ Phimister, “Discourse and the Discipline of Historical Context,” 273.

⁵² OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1947) 380.

⁵³ OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1947) 381.

had seen the value, but there was no law. It was voluntary.⁵⁴ Although these recommendations were not enforced for many years, tenant leases eventually would include clauses on acceptable farming methods.

In other instances, government policy influenced decisions made by mission authorities that would have more immediate impact. Even as Rev. Culver was encouraging centralization for Nyakatsapa, he admitted one of the problems facing the tenant community lay in “finding a method to get along successfully with only four cattle per family while guaranteeing milk, transport, and ploughing animals.”⁵⁵ The mission had instituted its own destocking policy, to the dismay of most residents. In the years prior to this, as many as one-third of the tenants owned no cattle whatsoever. Of the sixty tenant households that owned cattle in 1942, eleven had more than ten each. Three families owned more than twenty-five head. Following government standards, the livestock ceiling for a household farming the common six-acre allocation became four head of cattle. But only seven of these sixty households held four or fewer cattle.⁵⁶ Thus, the overwhelming majority of tenant stockholders experienced a reduction in their herd size, and certainly for some it amounted to an economic disaster (see Chapter 6).

Mission agricultural practices also drew criticism from other agencies following passage of the Natural Resources Act in 1941. The new Natural Resources Board appreciated that some missions insisted upon approved methods of

⁵⁴ E.C. Makunike, personal interview, 17 March 1998.

⁵⁵ OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1947) 380.

⁵⁶ OMA file Agriculture (Miscellaneous): M.J. Murphree to Cattle Inspector (Umtali), 20 April 1942.

agriculture and soil conservation, but pointed to the neglect of any such measures at other stations.⁵⁷ By 1948 the conservation situation on some stations in European areas appeared serious enough to warrant increased subsidies if the mission could not finance the necessary works. Such a request came in 1949 concerning St. Faith's mission (Anglican), which had failed to secure the funds to reclaim damaged lands. While some politicians feared such a policy might create a precedent in regards to conservation on mission lands, the NRB instead decried the loss of the mission's value for practical demonstration and propaganda amongst surrounding African communities.⁵⁸ During the following year, the NRB received a request from the Marandellas Intensive Conservation Area committee to help with the conservation situation on St. Bernard's (Catholic) mission. The NRB recommended that the mission retain land sufficient only for the efficient administration of the station as it currently held too much land to properly control. Mission authorities agreed to utilize any proceeds from the sale of surplus land for reclamation of the areas retained.⁵⁹

Such actions created substantial concern among AMEC missionaries who feared potential reductions in Church holdings, particularly following the Second World War as the state sought to allocate land for a new influx of settlers. In 1948, Rev. Roberts outlined the seriousness of the situation at Nyadiri. In requesting more

⁵⁷ NAZ file S482/291/39: Natural Resources Board, Memorandum on the Conservation of Natural Resources on the Land Occupied by Natives, 14 January 1943.

⁵⁸ GPSR: Natural Resources Board, Annual Report (Salisbury: Government Printer, 1949) 17.

⁵⁹ GPSR: Natural Resources Board, Annual Report (Salisbury: Government Printer, 1950) 20-21.

funds to develop farming operations there, he worried that “the government, seeing we are not using the land, may and can force us to relinquish some of our holdings. The tobacco business is such a goldmine, so attractive to every farmer. We are surrounded by them.”⁶⁰ That same year, the farm at Nyakatsapa had received “some strong and unpleasant supervision” to keep operations in line with the recommendations of the NRB. The school superintendent subsequently reported that farm tenants had responded “fairly well.”⁶¹

The trend towards coercion in government agricultural programs would eventually culminate in the passage of the Native Land Husbandry Act of 1951. This act sought to transfer conservation duties to individuals essentially held accountable through the allocation of fixed arable and grazing rights. This transformation away from ‘communal tenure’ would allow for the enforcement of ‘proper’ husbandry practices under the threat of dispossession. Yet the focus upon long-term conservation through physical improvements failed to generate direct increases in production except in the most ecologically favored areas. This absence of economic incentives, when combined with certain compulsory agricultural practices, provoked widespread resistance that eventually halted full-scale implementation of the NLHA in 1962.⁶²

Already in 1952, both Nyakatsapa and Glenada farms had found themselves under the scrutiny of government soil conservation officers. Mission authorities

⁶⁰ UMCA file 1045-5-2:14: G. Roberts to R.A. Archer, June 1948.

⁶¹ OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1948) 55.

⁶² Phimister, “Discourse and the Discipline of Historical Context,” 274.

were warned of dangerous erosion on both farms and advised of the legal penalties regarding lack of adequate soil conservation practices. The local soil conservation officer followed up the next year with a written estimate of the costs involved to complete the necessary works. The Conference Field Committee rejected these numbers on the grounds that the situation did not constitute an emergency. However, state pressure increased in 1954 when the Minister of Agriculture requested reports on Glenada because of its obvious erosion. The subsequent Conference Agricultural Survey admitted that the government's recommendations had received only a "token response" and concluded that "if the present state of the farm is allowed to continue, our already damaged conservation reputation will be further damaged."⁶³ Mission authorities still viewed the problem as essentially one of adequate funding to support additional trained agriculturalists for closer supervision of tenant farmers. They eventually decided to begin an on-farm training program which could complement the government's Master Farmer program.

The NRB continued to express the general opinion that too many missions appeared interested only in conversion and not conservation, stressing that if such conditions continued missions would very shortly find themselves without any natural resources to support their spiritual efforts. However, NRB members recognized that despite a steadily increasing awareness of the problem amongst mission authorities, many stations continued to have difficulty in securing funds for soil reclamation projects. They suggested that more missions could begin addressing the situation through sponsorship of good farming certificates among

⁶³ OMA file A24: Conference Agricultural Survey for Field Committee (August 1954) 5.

their tenants. Thus, the NRB came to view soil conservation as an integral part of missionary endeavor and questioned “whether missions which show complete disregard for soil and things of the soil can ever save souls.”⁶⁴

In 1961, the NRB proposed an alternative solution for those missions unable to adequately control the farming activities of those living on their land. The Board recommended that the Land Apportionment Act be amended with a provision allowing missions to voluntarily transfer land under their control to the classification of “Native Area.” While mission authorities would retain their religious and educational rights, control over the use of natural resources (particularly arable and grazing areas) would then fall under the provisions of the NLHA. NRB members had hoped the acceptance of such an amendment would allow trained and experienced government staff to apply the NLHA in problem areas, leaving missionaries free to pursue their spiritual work.⁶⁵ However, these recommendations were not accepted. In any case, it seems doubtful such a scheme could have been effected, given the widespread staff shortages encountered when attempting to implement the NLHA in the reserves. The NRB recognized its own limitations, lamenting the lack of control it could exert over cultivation and grazing on mission farms. By 1962, the NRB found itself “unable to take any positive steps to prevent such abuse due to the general problem of land shortage in tribal areas and the inability of mission authorities to deal with the situation.”⁶⁶

⁶⁴ GPSR: Natural Resources Board, Annual Report (Salisbury: Government Printer, 1958) 21.

⁶⁵ GPSR: Natural Resources Board, Annual Report (Salisbury: Government Printer, 1961) 21.

⁶⁶ GPSR: Natural Resources Board, Annual Report (Salisbury: Government Printer, 1962) 19.

Certain AMEC officials briefly entertained suggestions for land reclassification as a way to relieve the Conference of responsibility for conservation controls and decidedly costly reclamation efforts. In 1961, the AMEC Agricultural Committee recommended transfer of all church-held lands to the category of "unreserved land" with the understanding that lands required by the institutions of the Church would retain all the rights and privileges included by the original title deeds. The AMEC Rhodesia Conference Lands Committee agreed, suggesting the surrender of non-institutional land at Nyakatsapa and Arnoldine farms to the state for exclusively African utilization. First choice of holdings would go to tenants with existing farming leases, with the provision that government would not reduce the size of any individual plots. Following reclassification, those living on government-controlled lands could still participate in the mission-sponsored master farmer training program. Finally, the Lands Committee insisted that church institutions maintain prior water rights in any land transfer.⁶⁷

The subsequent AMEC Committee on Use of Mission Lands considered both the opinions of local church members and advice from government/legal sources. Congregations naturally tended to desire that all lands were used productively, while mission authorities remained sensitive to any potential association with the practice of absentee landholding. Mission lands were not to appear idle while African farmers needed good land located close to water supplies, transport, and markets. However, local churches tended to favor continued mission ownership over parcelling out non-institutional lands, even to individual Africans.

⁶⁷ OMA: The Methodist Church, Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1961) 100-101.

According to the Committee on Use of Mission Lands, most felt that the land “must not be used in such a way as to be of especial or extraordinary advantage to a privileged few.”⁶⁸ For its part, the government could not offer any positive assurances as to the outcome for mission tenants should the land reclassification take place. Committee members feared government officials might consider existing holdings as “uneconomic” and thus jeopardize some tenants’ land rights. Ironically, members also felt such transfers might also incur the opposition of neighboring white farmers who would claim depreciation of their property values.

The Committee also looked closely at the situation on Nyakatsapa farm, where leaseholders seemed to place the Church in a difficult position. While requesting that the farm continue under mission administration, many tenants were refusing to abide by the terms of their lease. If Nyakatsapa continued under church authority, it would require strict adherence to the conservation and farming terms within the lease. Alternately, if the Church sought transfer to “unreserved” status, the Committee could only hope the government would not force any of those who held leases to leave. Missionaries felt farm tenants therefore needed to clearly understand that if reclassification occurred, there could be “no assurance to the people either by the Church or government that all the people presently living there

⁶⁸ OMA: The Methodist Church, Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1962) 107.

would be allowed to remain.”⁶⁹ Such logistical uncertainties, combined with community resistance, meant that the AMEC farms remained under mission administration.

While efforts to transform farming practices in the reserves officially began in 1927, the 1930s represented a crucial decade in shaping state policies on African agriculture for much of the remaining colonial period. In responding to settler demands for a more permanent solution to troublesome land tenure issues, state land policy adopted the principles of separation and land apportionment. The resulting imbalance created conditions in the reserves that would generate increasing concern about the long-term viability of segregated land tenure. This apprehension mounted in an atmosphere of global depression and well-publicized environmental disaster in the United States. As reserves became more crowded, problems with erosion and overgrazing were widely reported.

Many of the earliest state responses resonated clearly with AMEC teachings, as the longtime Director of Native Agriculture designed much of his department’s program around his own prior experiences as a missionary. Like most missionaries, Alvord accepted the allocation of reserve lands as essentially final, gearing DNA efforts towards rationalizing land use patterns and promoting small-scale, intensive production methods. Centralization and the construction of state irrigation projects each held multiple impacts for mission communities. For missions near the reserves, the reorganization of villages created new opportunities for evangelism. But for those surrounded by European farms, land apportionment emptied churches

⁶⁹ OMA: The Methodist Church, Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1962) 110.

and schools. Irrigation projects frequently created a new mix of residents that would quickly challenge the primacy of any established mission churches. Evidence from the Mutambara project reveals how relations between missions and neighboring reserves could strain over access to crucial water resources.

The risks of missionaries appearing too closely aligned with state policy became quite apparent by the late-1950s, when mounting rural frustrations challenged their ability to sustain stewardship as a viable message. Field and herd reductions, which in many areas had accompanied implementation of the NLHA, had further convinced AMEC missionaries of the necessity for promoting rationalized intensive farming. But local farmers clearly viewed the situation in different terms. As one Conference Agricultural Committee report noted, “There is an increasing impatience among African farmers in this matter, due partly to the fact that land cannot be expanded either for individual families or for the increasing numbers of families. There is an increasing urgency to relate stewardship of the earth and its’ products to the Christian church. . . .”⁷⁰ Even mission-sponsored agricultural improvement and resource conservation programs had taken on political meaning as the state attempted to enforce the NLHA on an increasingly resistant rural population.

⁷⁰ OMA: The Methodist Church, Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1959) 382.

CHAPTER 4

MONEY RUNNING DOWN THE RIVER: FARMING AND THE ECONOMY OF MISSION COMMUNITIES

In addition to their expected role in transforming adherents' substantive worldview, farming and agricultural productivity amounted to very practical concerns for the rural AMEC missions. Regular financial constraints meant mission lands became a crucial part of any attempt at self-sufficiency. Even a prosperous surrounding community could not support all Church activities. This chapter begins by briefly outlining the physical and economic geographies of AMEC stations. It then discusses missionary goals for the Rhodesia Conference farms and how agricultural conditions could influence mission activities. The analysis proceeds to focus on two specific elements of mission farming systems: irrigation and tenant occupation. Irrigation became important not only for its immediate productive advantages, but also because it represented a specific understanding and control of the environment. Missionaries intended tenant farms to foster an example of rural Christian living within mission confines. But tenants also had their own concerns while living on mission lands.

Old Mutare Mission stands on the land originally granted to the AMEC Bishop for Southern Africa, Joseph Hartzell, by Cecil Rhodes. Two immediate factors led to the station's establishment in 1897. As part of its larger project of establishing rail service between Salisbury and the coast, the British South Africa

Company transferred its regional headquarters to Umtali. Due to the steep gradients, however, Company engineers constructing the railroad found it impossible to run the line through to Umtali. So the settlement was effectively relocated to the rail line. The Company then donated its buildings and a large tract of land to the AMEC. Hence the abandoned site which the mission station occupied became known as Old Umtali. The mission farm eventually covered some three thousand acres and soon contained several schools, village clinics and numerous outstations.

Spreading around the eastern base of Mount Chiremba, mission lands have long been surrounded by European commercial farms. The nearest communal areas lie over fifteen kilometers distant. As the historical epicenter of AMEC missionary activities and site of their first secondary school, Old Umtali covered over 2600 acres. Fields are mostly heavier, red clay soils that require regular addition of organic matter to maintain their fertility. Its close proximity to primary roads and markets (Umtali, Penhalonga) provided outlets for any mission farm surplus or cash crop production. By 1928 the station's facilities had expanded to include a boarding school for boys and girls (Hartzell Institute), nurses training school, dispensary, and mission press. By this time the AMEC holdings totaled 18,950 acres within Southern Rhodesia.¹

Mrewa Mission lay approximately fifty miles from Salisbury on a major artery for traffic to Portuguese East Africa (Mozambique) and Nyasaland (Malawi). The environment consists of highveld grasslands interspersed with massive granite

¹ E.W. Smith, The Way of the White Fields in Rhodesia: A Survey of Christian Enterprise in Northern and Southern Rhodesia (London: World Dominion Press, 1928) 68.

and basalt batholiths. In the colonial period, Mrewa center was surrounded by reserve and purchase area lands. There were no European farms in the immediate area. However, the road and proximity to Salisbury meant that farmers in this area were more able to market their crops and produce. Today, Murehwa center is classified as a growth point by government standards. While a busy and bustling hub for transport, no commercial banks or major chain stores have branches there. It remains a small country town. However, due to the relative ease of transport, the mission school is quite popular for parents residing in Harare. One result of this is the general sense of wealth on this mission. Teachers' houses are better maintained. Many have phone lines installed with working electricity as well as indoor plumbing. Under Chief Mangwende in the 1940s and 1950s, the surrounding area also had a reputation as a "progressive" district where mission ideas about proper Christian living took a particularly strong hold in the community. While his relationship with the Rhodesian government eventually turned sour and resulted in his removal from office, for many years he was presented as a model of the exemplary colonial chief.

Nyadiri Mission sat roughly equidistant from Mrewa and Mtoko. Currently, the mission may be reached only by irregularly maintained country roads. The terrain here is slightly undulating, with sandy soils broken up by forested kopjes. The remnants of the old tarmac are now nearly invisible in most sections. Nyadire is still one of the largest United Methodist properties, covering several thousand acres on both sides of a large year-round river. The Church obtained the farm in 1924 in exchange for property given up at Old Umtali. As Old Umtali had become

nearly surrounded by white commercial farms, a location like Nyadiri promised access to more potential converts.² The station itself is situated on flat ground. In addition to the primary and secondary schools, the site now contains the United Methodist teacher training college and a sizable hospital which handles referrals from government clinics throughout the district. Uzumba communal lands adjoin the mission parcel.

Nyakatsapa Mission is located about forty kilometers north of Mutare, just off the road to Nyanga. This area is quite mountainous, with granite cliffs and outcrops dominating the landscape. Standing in the mission school grounds, one can see distant peaks in three directions. Immediately behind the school, the mission lands extend up the side of a mountain with some homes being only just visible. Tenant farm plots extend in the other direction nearly to Watsomba, a small growth point along the Nyanga road. Mission lands totalling 4170 acres were actually purchased from a European farmer (Meikles) in 1911 for £900. In 1912, missionary A.L. Buchwalter commented, "the farm at Nyakatsapa as regards to productiveness of the soil, is hardly ideal, but. . .I believe that without much outlay for either labour or equipment some farming can profitably be done."³ As Edgington notes, however, this lack of rich soil, capital inputs and accessible markets made farming on the mission take on the characteristics of a Native Reserve. Several small dams, built in the 1960s, are still visible from the access road to the school grounds and church buildings. The farms are occupied by

² Edgington 172.

³ Edgington 105-6.

approximately eighty tenant families, most of whom retain lease rights granted prior to 1950. Many of these households are multi-generational, such that the tenant parcels have undergone a certain amount of fragmentation over the years.

Mutambara Mission, originally known as the McAndrews farm, was deeded for mission purposes by the BSAC in 1909. Located fifty miles south of Mutare, just off the road to Cashel Valley, a productive commercial farming area, the mission lands directly adjoin the reserve designated to Chief Mutambara. At one time described as "potentially the best producing farm in the conference," the grant covered 3665 acres, of which, approximately 3200 were either mountainous or suitable only for grazing.⁴ By 1954, mission and school agricultural operations utilized 270 acres, including 200 acres under irrigation from the Umvumvumvu furrow. An additional sixty-eight acres were under cultivation through an informal subletting agreement with the Womens' Division of Christian Service (WDCS), the church organ responsible for maintaining a separate girls' boarding school.

Arnoldine Farm became a Methodist mission in 1917 after receiving a title from the BSAC which specified use for mission purposes only. The total grant amounted to 2452 acres. Rev. David Mandisodza only arrived in 1923 to begin evangelizing amongst the local population. The new regulations of mission Christianity, coupled with growing insecurity of African land tenure as settlers claimed farms in the area, resulted in the movement of established households away from the farm and surrounding areas. Vena Maforo remembered rather severe depopulation: "Only five families remained. A lot of people left for the reserves.

⁴ OMA file A24: Conference Agricultural Survey for Field Committee (August 1954) 10.

After those people had left, the land turned into a wilderness, attracting wildlife. We had lions roaming the villages and killing people. Father Mandisodza had to shoot the wild animals for us to live without fear.⁵ This also points to the probable under-utilization of these newly designated European farms. Although the Fusiri and Rukunda families arrived in the 1930s, Arnoldine itself remained sparsely inhabited until the early 1940s, when a larger group of tenants arrived from the Mutasa area.

Located about twenty kilometers from the small farming entrepot of Headlands, Arnoldine was once surrounded by European lands and drew most of its students from farm workers' families. Today, Arnoldine lies within a government resettlement area. This change, coupled with the closure of the nearby Inyati mine, has meant a drop in student enrollment at the primary school. It remains probably the least developed United Methodist mission farm, with only a single borehole serving its entire school and tenant population. None of its buildings appeared to have indoor plumbing, a feature found at all five other research sites.

In each of these varied communities, the AMEC hoped prosperous farming conditions would make possible the extension of mission-centered activities, especially construction of churches, schools, and health facilities. AMEC missionaries became more sharply aware of their connection with the broader agricultural economy during the early 1930s. Edgington has categorized mission farms at the end of this decade as three basic types: education centers, productive commercial farms and native reserves. Old Umtali farm income amounted to over

⁵ Vena Maforo, personal interview, 11 March 1998.

£2200 in both 1934 and 1938. Proximity to urban and mining markets give it an obvious edge over Mutambara or Nyadiri, but each of these stations contained both educational and commercial elements. However, Nyakatsapa and Arnoldine are described as ‘native reserve type’ farms, exhibiting little or no farm income those years.⁶

For most of the 1930s, the combination of discriminatory government marketing policies and general economic depression made it difficult for many in these communities to maintain their level of support for mission activities. The drop in grain prices meant that the volume of contributions for schools and churches had to approximately double. This increased burden meant teacher/pastor salaries sometimes went unpaid and even caused some adherents to leave the fold.⁷ Largely ignoring the constraints arising from government policies, subsequent missionary discourse attempted to connect church fiscal health with their particular model of small-scale agriculture. Progressive farmers would more likely escape seasonal vagaries and maintain a consistent level of tithing contributions.

Even after relatively good harvests, however, tithing frequently remained a source of disappointment for AMEC missionaries. In 1940, Rev. H.E. Taylor blamed local church leaders for failing to discipline their “delinquent” members. He classified non-givers as “cold” Christians, individuals who failed to help further mission work. If this situation continued, Taylor predicted that “there will be the

⁶ Edgington 215-17.

⁷ Ranger, Peasant Consciousness, 89.

continuance of our present difficulties regarding financing our work.⁸ While concluding the basic source of such support lay in better farming methods, Taylor feared any increased rural prosperity might be siphoned off by other priorities or obligations. Therefore, he actually insisted that “one truly committed to God’s will must welcome advice on giving, involving, if necessary, minute study of his resources in order to arrive at a true view of his ability to give.” Taylor also criticized “extravagant” African spending on weddings and baptismal celebrations, labeling it “the same as stealing from God’s work.”⁹ This suggests a basic failure to understand or accept that converts invariably tried to incorporate existing social relationships and practices within their newfound faith.

Part of the resultant tension also arose from the increasing availability of basic consumer items in rural areas, resulting in a variety of competition for any disposable income farmers could generate. By 1944, higher wartime prices for some agricultural items created something of a dilemma at Mtoko for Rev. Wilfred Bourgaize, who deplored “the necessity for the occasional pressure that one has to bring to bear to secure part of this income. But, the fact remains that never before have the natives in the reserves been so prosperous - though, of course, they will not admit this.”¹⁰ Faced with their own financial concerns, missionaries consistently sought to ensure that any individual or household success in agriculture would

⁸ OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1940) 43.

⁹ OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1940) 43.

¹⁰ OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1944) 25.

transfer to increased financial support for church operations. Such sentiments were rooted in the broader colonial discourse about African consumption patterns. Part of mission Christian doctrine therefore attempted to differentiate between the legitimate material “needs” and unnecessary “wants” of African adherents.¹¹ AMEC missionaries were attempting to impart a Christian identity whose economic component would both ensure a reasonable standard of living and channel any additional income towards church-approved ends.

The success of station agricultural enterprises also figured into AMEC calculations on community self-sufficiency. As in much of colonial Africa, missionaries closely linked the chances of achieving self-supporting Christian communities and introducing proper salaries for mission personnel to the performance of a station’s agricultural scheme.¹² Mission policies attempted to ensure that teachers would earn a wage which permitted them to live on a scale above the people with whom they associated. When teachers’ individual plots failed to produce sufficient crops, the wage “did not give much money for the purchase of books nor the other necessities of life.”¹³ The mission farm played a critical role in reducing expenditures for the feeding of boarding school pupils. Farm production could also generate important cash income. For example, milk from the large herds at Mutambara was at one time sufficient to permit a valuable

¹¹ T. Burke, Lifebouy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption, and Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996) 100.

¹² Hansen 157.

¹³ OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1946) 227.

trade in cream. Lucerne fields at Old Umtali supplied a small but remunerative local market. Yet despite the centrality of agriculture to mission financial and ideological goals, the long term performance of AMEC farms appears mixed at best.

While most missionaries consistently agreed that church-owned lands should receive major attention, the varied success of the farms in generating incomes each year eventually produced several philosophies concerning their management and development. Although fundamentally in agreement that the farms should be operated "in the most intelligent way to save the land and yet make a profit," basic differences arose over their association to the educational program.¹⁴ Some suggested that farm programs closely correspond to agricultural needs in the reserves, utilizing similar types of equipment and power. The school lands would then act as a laboratory for teaching good agriculture and not solely as a principle source of food for boarding students. But could mission farms actually reconcile the twin goals of demonstration and production? Difficulty in solving this dilemma led others to believe the farms should be managed along strictly commercial lines, completely separated from the school program. A small minority went even further, advocating the complete removal of farming operations from the realm of mission staff responsibility. This might even entail the granting of long term leases to competent local farmers.¹⁵

¹⁴ OMA file 145: J.T. Thacker, "Financing a Mission Program," presented to Field Committee (1947) 6.

¹⁵ OMA file 145: "Memo on the action of the Field Committee as recommended by the Agricultural Committee," 14 March 1955. This idea was later rejected for legal reasons.

Nearly all of these options would require substantial capital inputs to really pay off. However, as Edgington has pointed out, “the goal of farm self-sufficiency existed in the first place because the mission lacked funds. Therefore, the farms were operated year to year on a threadbare budget. . . .”¹⁶ Consider that when G.P. Braithwaite took over the agricultural department at Old Umtali in 1939, he found some sixty acres growing despite “very poor cultivation.” His annual report tried to sound hopeful, but really pointed towards the source of many farm difficulties: “I was very much impressed to find such a high standard of work being done with so limited capital and equipment.”¹⁷ Thus, mission farming operations seldom depended only on the weather. The personality and priorities of the missionary-in-charge also accounted for a great deal of variation in the performance of the different farms. A resourceful and demanding agriculturist such as Rev. George Roberts was more likely to complain of insufficient funds, but could also be counted on to raise more donations from abroad. In the longer term, because most missionaries changed positions within the mission system, there was frequently a corresponding lack of continuity in farm performance. For example, when Roberts left for his furlough in 1929, the cattle at Old Umtali numbered 260 head. His replacement quickly sold the entire herd, using the proceeds to purchase two Ford trucks for transport and evangelism. While eliminating the mission herd, these funds later helped purchase the station’s first tractor.¹⁸

¹⁶ Edgington 190.

¹⁷ OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1939) 331.

¹⁸ OMA file 521: T. Roberts, “Account of G.A. Roberts’ Life,” 1972.

A wide disparity in yields also occurred frequently between the various stations. Located across several rainfall regimes, some stations struggled to produce during the same season that others experienced significant results. Mission farms could not isolate themselves from weather patterns or market trends. In 1939, prolonged rains across most of the eastern districts produced a widespread decline in crop yields. The Mutambara farm could not produce enough for its boarding students and had to buy maize locally at unfavorable terms. At Nyadiri, the mission fields yielded only 200 bags of mealies, although improved dry season pasture conditions provided some compensation. The sixty acres planted at Old Umtali yielded only 5.3 bags per acre, a result agricultural instructor G.P. Braithwaite termed “poor for our type of soil.”¹⁹ This farm subsequently retained a recently arrived Carl W. Huie as farm manager, a position separate from any teaching responsibilities. The following season appeared to justify the extra expense. Not only did the vegetable gardens produce enough to avoid purchasing relish, but the farm yielded 1403 bags of maize and seventy-seven bags of beans, enough for estimated annual boarding requirements.²⁰

In 1941, the various stations experienced uneven agricultural returns. While Mtoko managed to grow sufficient crops for boarding student needs, lack of rain at Mutambara again necessitated spending “far too much money for food” in spite of

¹⁹ OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1939) 331.

²⁰ OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1940) 49.

“setting a good example for soil conservation and sound agricultural practices.”²¹ Rainfall at Old Umtali was also below normal, but the farm got substantial returns from 200 acres of maize, twenty acres of beans, and 100 acres of sunhemp. A diesel tractor aided in this extensive operation that yielded over 1600 bags of maize and sixty bags of beans.²² Thus, even results for moderate rainfall years could sometimes be used to legitimate mission farm management strategies. The Mrewa mission farm reportedly yielded twelve bags of maize per acre in 1942, more than doubling the national average. Such disparity in agricultural performance, however, could also reflect variations in land quality or access to capital and equipment. Furthermore, this statistic remains problematic in that it does not specify whether both African and European production figures are included in the national average. Regardless, such instances receive mention in annual missionary reports precisely because they signified success in the midst of failure, the validation of a mission Christian understanding of agriculture for conditions in colonial Zimbabwe.²³

Drought conditions made mission farm production more crucial to station budgets than usual, but they also raised the profile of any successful efforts. Many districts faced recurrent drought or near-drought conditions between 1947-1951. Mutambara received just one-third of its normal rainfall in 1947 (seven inches) and only managed to produce a credible crop through extensive use of irrigation. Still,

²¹ OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1941) 132.

²² OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1941) 142.

²³ OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1942) 218.

the farm supplied most of the boarding requirements and even generated some cash crops.²⁴ At Old Umtali, drought struck just as most crops flowered. With 125 acres under maize and another 100 containing cowpeas and velvet beans, weaknesses in the station's irrigation system proved quite costly. Farm manager J.T Thacker could only thoroughly water parts of the maize fields and most crops received little irrigation. Pasturage for mission livestock suffered heavily as well. This raised the urgency of cooperation with government irrigation officers to plan more effectively for the farm's potential water consumption.²⁵

Rains largely failed again in 1948, revealing problems with water access at Mtoko mission. Crop yields only reached one-third normal levels, requiring the purchase of mealies for the boarding students. At Mutambara, however, although the farm did not produce to capacity, the fields still yielded over 1000 bags of maize and enough vegetables to minimize outside food purchases. 1949 reports indicated famine around Mtoko and Chikwizo, with no food available for purchase in the area. At nearby Nyadiri, pasture grasses could not recover and grain crops failed. Rivers ran nearly dry. Yet at Mrewa, less than 50km distant, people apparently spoke of "the greatest harvest in their memory" and farm results at Mutambara appeared relatively healthy.²⁶ By the 1951 season, it appeared farm production

²⁴ OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1947) 376.

²⁵ OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1947) 391-92.

²⁶ OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1949) 182. The failure of crops at Nyadire meant all food for 300 students was purchased "at very high prices with cash we often have not had." UMCA George Roberts Papers: G. A/ Roberts, "Christmas letter," 10 November 1949.

might return to normal levels at all AMEC centers. But once again no rains fell during the pivotal month of February. Subsequently referred to in mission reports as "Black February," this particular episode severely reduced yields at Nyadiri while cutting significantly into returns at Old Umtali and Mutambara.²⁷

Although missionaries might have blamed weather alone for this extended spate of difficulties on most mission center farms, official reports indicate their awareness of other factors. For example, in 1948, Rev. George Roberts highlighted the constraints facing the farms due to limited available capital. His chief concern was now mechanization, as the necessity of maintaining soil conservation works had dramatically increased labor requirements. While superintendent at Nyadiri, Roberts wrote repeatedly to the Board of Missions office in New York, requesting funds for a tractor and cultivator attachment. He argued that the mission possessed a good farm, "but we cannot make use of more than five percent of it with the present equipment."²⁸ Of the large center farms, Nyadiri would remain the most problematic to senior mission officials for some years. The 1955 annual report could only conclude that some progress had occurred since the farm had "come nearer to paying its way this year than last. . . ."²⁹ The next season's results were more positive, particularly after a contribution from the United States facilitated purchase of a small Jersey dairy herd. The satisfaction lasted only briefly. In 1957

²⁷ OMA: The Methodist Church, Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1951) 358.

²⁸ UMCA file 1045-5-2:14: G.A. Roberts to R.A. Archer, 1 June 1948.

²⁹ OMA: The Methodist Church, Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1955) 372.

the farm again suffered with a poor crop, owing chiefly to “deficiency in labour, management, and capital.”³⁰

The disappointing yields at Nyadiri also seemed to indicate poor soil conditions, which potentially made much of the farm land there a financial liability. Actual soil tests for Old Umtali had revealed deficiencies in the phosphates vital to good grain yields. Mutambara needed inputs for better water management, especially during heavy rain seasons.³¹ These difficulties occurred amidst more strident official rhetoric and intensified government attention towards rural land use practices. The Natural Resources Act (1941) and the Native Land Husbandry Act (1951), while not directing much attention towards mission lands, did precipitate an atmosphere of unease and uncertainty amongst many AMEC missionaries. In this effort to transform African agricultural and conservation practices, government policies in effect challenged mission farms to follow suit. In order to maintain any illusions of demonstrational value or continue claiming a leadership role in the extension of modern methods, mission farming operations would have to meet or exceed official standards. Such an environment only served as a catalyst to finally provoke an overall assessment of AMEC farming operations.

The Conference Agricultural Survey of 1954 emerged as an attempt to address long standing problems and reformulate a consistent mission agricultural policy. The main survey authors explained the urgency rather directly, stating, “Our

³⁰ OMA: The Methodist Church, Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1957) 191.

³¹ OMA: The Methodist Church, Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1952) 63.

present manner of land utilization makes us defensive toward the government, embarrassed and apologetic with progressive farmers both black and white.”³² Together comprising a new generation of trained agricultural missionaries, Wallace Kinyon (arrived 1950) and Bruce Smalley (arrived 1952) introduced a more critical element into the usual assessment of the Conference agricultural endeavors. Both men brought more training and experience than perhaps any previous AMEC missionary. Kinyon had managed his family’s dairy farm for several years before earning a B.Sc. in agricultural marketing. Prior to arriving in Rhodesia, he served with the United States Department of Agriculture for five years. Smalley also came to university from a rural background with nearly constant farm experience. He attained a B.Sc. in agricultural extension shortly before his assignment to Nyadiri.

To begin with, the Kinyon and Smalley recommended a more precise delineation of responsibilities for agricultural appointees. Seldom had agricultural instructors successfully split their time between teaching and farm management. The proposed solution depended on the missions financing a trained staff who would devote their full energies to agricultural programs outside the existing government curriculum. The authors proposed that financial support for an expanded agricultural staff should originate in the United States. Newly arrived agricultural missionaries would not take full responsibility for any farming operations before completing a six month apprenticeship to an experienced agriculturalist designated by the bishop. Hiring additional trained African staff would complement these agricultural missionaries by managing daily operations “so

³² OMA file A24: Conference Agricultural Survey for Field Committee (August 1954) 1.

that the missionary may work in specialized agriculture teaching, demonstration, or extension.³³

The Survey then shifts emphasis towards the individual mission farm units. The Mutambara farm had at least remained self-sufficient, albeit with the aid of boarding fees. During the 1952-53 season, it produced 626 bags of maize on ninety-one acres and 190 bags of wheat on fifty acres. The Survey judged these production results to be low, reflecting the need for better farm planning and more efficient use of labor supplies. During the regular school year, the farm employed ten workers full time whose efforts were supplemented by the pupils. Clearly, the Survey authors recognize the limitations of their reliance upon student labor, since distance to the fields minimized efficiency and students did not match the productivity of full-time employees. Conditions on the WDCS girls' school section also caused concern. Instead of attempting to cultivate nearly sixty acres, the reports recommended that efforts should concentrate on the intensive use of only twenty-five acres.

Much to the chagrin of these mission officials, it appeared farmers in the neighboring reserves were probably producing more per acre, "especially in view of their land and water conditions."³⁴ But more important in their eyes, as a result of frequent changes in administrative personnel, Mutambara farm lacked any long term plan of operations. While the current missionary in charge, Rev. Lennart Bloomquist, possessed qualifications as an industrial instructor, his agricultural

³³ OMA file A24: Conference Agricultural Survey for Field Committee (August 1954) 4.

³⁴ OMA file A24: Conference Agricultural Survey for Field Committee (August 1954) 10-12.

training appears limited to a handful of courses at Texas Tech during 1953. Worse yet, the previous two administrators had even more limited farm experience and their attention had been mostly diverted by numerous other ministerial responsibilities.

Kinyon himself had taken over the management of Old Umtali fields which operated independently of the school farm. Along with Smalley, he argued for placing this section on a more thoroughly commercial outlook. These fields could not provide any benefit to school agricultural instruction, as they lay nearly a mile from the classrooms. Nor did it seem that mission employees would gain from expanded access, as most did not fully plough their existing three acre allotments elsewhere on the station. Although mechanized and staffed with hired labor, the large farm moved slowly towards self-sufficiency. The survey also noted that past income had often gone towards general station maintenance and services instead of providing working capital for the farm. The farm had to meet all labor charges and equipment expenses before being expected to subsidize any other mission program. Farm income might then finance a mission agricultural extension program for reserve farmers, something to supplement government efforts. After reading a Natural Resources Board report on the inadequate staffing and resultant ineffectiveness of official extension efforts, Kinyon and Smalley saw the opportunity for an expanded mission program, concluding that "for some time to come the government will not be able to offer effective agricultural service."³⁵

³⁵ OMA file A24: Conference Agricultural Survey for Field Committee (August 1954) 17.

Smalley had taken over the Nyadiri operations in 1952. His subsequent study of rainfall patterns there revealed the farm's chief vulnerability. Since 1932, a potentially favorable average of twenty-nine inches fell annually. But the distribution of rains remained low during the planting and early growing season. Heavy rains followed most Decembers, creating difficulties with weeding or further plantings. Finally, periodic late season droughts ensured only marginal yields for most maize crops. The authors therefore felt only drought resistant seed varieties could ensure sufficient production. Farm and school fields were not providing nearly enough maize to meet human and stock requirements. Yields per acre needed to increase dramatically before the farm could produce maize more cheaply than the selling price in nearby reserves. Production returns barely met running costs, so the improvements necessary for attaining any degree self-sufficiency depended upon outside funding. The survey results recommended a minimum investment of £10,000 over five years "in order for the farm to fully realize its production, teaching, and demonstration possibilities."³⁶

By the late 1950s, the orientation of most agricultural operations at the main center farms had shifted away from any prior focus on the demonstrational value for students or surrounding communities. While boarding school attendance continued to rise annually, the student labor force became increasingly reluctant and therefore largely insufficient to meet station requirements. The larger AMEC farms faced a production crisis as managers continued to struggle with inadequate supplies of labor and capital. In an attempt to place the large farms on a more commercial

³⁶ OMA file A24: Conference Agricultural Survey for Field Committee (August 1954) 23.

footing, the Conference Agricultural Committee passed a resolution in 1961 that finally permitted managers to seek loans for annual operating expenses. Managers of the commercial production units (Old Umtali, Mutambara, and Nyadiri) could borrow an amount calculated at £10 per acre of land planted to a new crop. Machinery and livestock would serve as collateral, with the provision that loans not exceed fifty percent of reported inventory value.³⁷

The construction and maintenance of farm irrigation works also required the investment of additional capital. Perhaps more than any other physical feature, an irrigation system served to distinguish mission lands from surrounding communities. Providing a means to overcome the impact of seasonal weather variability also meant that mission irrigation systems could represent a particular Christian understanding or control of environmental processes. As the principal of Hartzell School (Old Umtali) noted, "most of you do not have rich soil such as we have at Old Umtali, and you do not have water for irrigation such as we have here."³⁸ AMEC irrigation efforts had begun on Mutambara mission in 1908 with the construction of a furrow to supply some two hundred acres. An early encounter involving water and ecological control occurred when widespread crop failure hit the eastern districts during the 1912 season. People around Mutambara mission found themselves reduced to eating roots and pods of trees. Yet that season the irrigated fields on the mission farm were pushed to their limit, with some portions

³⁷ OMA: The Methodist Church, *Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference* (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1961) 71-72.

³⁸ OMA file African Advance: M.J. Murphree to "All Patrons & Friends of Hartzell Training School," 31 March 1951. There is no indication whether a final version of this handwritten draft ever circulated publicly.

producing three full crops. For months people came daily to the mission for food supplies. Rev. H.I. James later wrote that "when the danger was over the old heathen chief said *god has helped us this year.*"³⁹ The mission population subsequently experienced significant growth over the next year. In the midst of some extended droughts, the mission also became a government grain relief purchase center that sold maize to supplement meager local supplies.⁴⁰ Eventually, the furrow would power a water wheel, enabling the station to grind its own grain and enjoy electric lighting.

Surrounding farmers apparently took encouragement from the mission example and built small ditches to irrigate new gardens. After the hunger of 1912, reserve residents began construction of a furrow to their lands, completing it prior to any efforts of Agricultural Department demonstrators in the area. Experiences in the employ of European landowners seem to have shaped this effort. Ernest Sisimayi affirmed that the main individuals involved with the original scheme had prior experience with irrigation on commercial farms.⁴¹ Mission school pupils could also play a crucial role in the extension of irrigation techniques. Most of these small plots were utilized in the manner of *matoro* (vleis) cultivation to supplement dryland foodcrops. However, one small group of men, some related to the chief, had begun working larger plots (up to ten acres) and marketing their produce to the

³⁹ H.I. James, Missions in Rhodesia under the Methodist Episcopal Church (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1935) 57.

⁴⁰ Edgington 375: 167.

⁴¹ E. Sisimayi, personal interview, 25 February 1998.

mission or around Umtali. These irrigation works were not constructed by communal work parties or chiefly-imposed labor obligations. Rather, "gradual extension resulted from the initiative and work of families or individuals acting in groups. . .they were men who had gathered experience and training in missions or in the employ of the government. . ."⁴²

By the mid-1950s, several difficulties faced this mission irrigation system. Two other neighboring farms utilized water from the same main furrow. Mission officials knew nothing about the legal status or size of these apparent water use grants. Thus, the dry season water supply to the mission had become highly variable in the absence of any management or control scheme with these farms. The girls' boarding irrigation drew upon a separate river, from which G.A. Roberts diverted water to Lisnacloon, his retirement farm. The Agricultural Committee worried "if the Roberts farm were to be sold, the rights of the Girls' School would have to be protected more carefully."⁴³ This unpredictability occurred despite the arrival of a generator that replaced the original turbine, freeing seven cusecs of water for further irrigation purposes. The mission also faced pressure from the adjoining reserve, where Agricultural Department officers sought to place more plots under irrigation. Of the 200 acres supposedly under irrigation at Mutambara, school and staff garden plots accounted for only fourteen acres. The remaining 186 acres of mission fields remained at least "theoretically" under irrigation, but concern

⁴² W. Roder, The Sabi Valley Irrigation Projects (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1965) 99.

⁴³ OMA file A24: Conference Agricultural Survey for Field Committee (August 1954) 11.

over losing their existing water rights prompted mission officials to seek better methods of water usage and control.⁴⁴

Old Umtali also secured official water rights in 1925. Irrigation began after students helped trench and install a mile of secondhond four-inch pipe to bring the water to its usage point. This addition transformed the possibilities of agriculture on the mission station itself. By 1926, the system was generating enough electricity to light the entire mission as well as power shop/farm machinery. Irrigation systems thereby enabled mission stations to challenge more effectively two of the elements that determined the pace and predictability of rural life, darkness and drought. The mission had official rights to irrigate ten acres from this furrow it shared with a neighboring European farm. It later obtained rights (through membership on the eight-member Old Umtali Irrigation Board) to a further two cusecs from the seventeen mile Odzani furrow. This additional flow expanded irrigation to 160 acres. Yet in times of severe drought, the system still experienced shortfalls, making it impossible to irrigate these acres fully.

Of the three major production farms, Nyadiri in particular required irrigation to effectively meet mission goals. Even when concentrating on livestock production, the farm often failed to meet student and livestock needs. Rev. T.A. O'Farrell bemoaned the frequent dry spells, as crops failed "even when we have done our best. Cattle get thin and some die. Pigs do not bring the returns we expect. Gardens dry up when vegetables are most needed."⁴⁵ O'Farrell hoped to place a

⁴⁴ OMA file A24: Conference Agricultural Survey for Field Committee (August 1954) 7.

⁴⁵ OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1942) 229.

small area under irrigation prior to the next regular growing season. Financial constraints stalled much further development in this direction. Over a decade later, a pump system could only flood two acres. AMEC officials gauged the potential irrigable land at twenty-five acres, but bringing in the water would entail construction of several dams and catchment systems.⁴⁶ Similar types of government projects also affected mission water supplies. Mtoko station found itself facing shortages after a nearby government-built dam diverted the Mudze river. While the new system supplied water for Mtoko proper, the extraction point above the mission greatly reduced water flow. The station superintendent subsequently sought to regain river access through lease of 100 acres adjacent to the mission lands “through which this rivers runs, or should I say, used to run.”⁴⁷

Although as many as six rivers once flowed through Nyakatsapa Mission, the Church delayed in obtaining any official water use rights. According to the survey commissioned by the field committee, “the government recognizes the irrigation, but is closing its eyes to the matter of legality.”⁴⁸ Of particular concern was continued access to water flow that originated outside the farm, given that government officials evidently began paying “more and more attention” to water use in this area. By 1954, the combined irrigated acreage of the school and tenant plots totaled forty-five acres. Mission authorities also faced pressure from some of

⁴⁶ OMA file A24: Conference Agricultural Survey for Field Committee (August 1954) 20.

⁴⁷ OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1948) 58.

⁴⁸ OMA file A24: Conference Agricultural Survey for Field Committee (August 1954) 1.

their tenants, who recognized the inequitable distribution of water within the mission lands.

Certainly, some missions differed only slightly from other European landlords in their relations with African tenants. But farms containing tenants were considered quite appropriate for the creation of Christian communities in colonial Africa since control could be exercised more closely than in stations outside villages.⁴⁹ For instance, missions tried to overcome early parental resistance to schooling by making education compulsory for children of tenants. Tenancy agreements did not always entail membership in the mission church. To expand the scope of their endeavor, missionaries often invited outside villagers to become tenants. Early on, Africans often moved away into the reserves to avoid the expense of rent and higher dipping fees at some stations.⁵⁰

In other situations, large mission landholdings fostered the emergence of farm tenancy in an effort to ensure existent Methodist enclaves survived under the pressures of settler colonialism. Faced with eviction as the government reclassified their land near Mutasa as a European area, a group of church members had approached missionaries at Old Mutare about their situation. While hoping to avert any major dispersal of this small Christian community, mission officials also saw an opportunity to resuscitate one of their more problematic properties. Nearly fifteen Methodist families finally arrived at Arnoldine in October of 1944. Isaiah

⁴⁹ W.R. Paden, Missionary Attitudes to Shona Culture 1890-1923 (Salisbury: Central Africa Historical Association, 1970) 19.

⁵⁰ Zachrisson 294.

Chimboza clearly recalled this journey, particularly since "some came by train but myself and a few others walked because we had to drive our cattle over here. It took us four days to get here."⁵¹

As these occupants of AMEC lands became tenants, they paid rent to missionary landlords and frequently worked without pay for a certain period each year. Tenant farms supposedly presented an opportunity to model the ideals of AMEC mission Christianity for all surrounding communities. But these ideals also found their way into the broader AMEC community and figured in their conceptions of rural social differentiation. Tenant farming presented only the most cohesive example of a new identity, distinct from neighboring reserve farmers and constructed upon perceived differences in morality, methods, and technology. References to the apparent divergence in agricultural methods evoke notions of self-discipline and the rational ordering of rural society. For AMEC converts in particular, consumption of alcohol figured prominently in distinguishing themselves from other farmers. To many believers, it seemed "they had better lands. . .well, not better lands, but better yields. . .and at the same time, they were cultivating better than those who were only going for beer drinks. . ."⁵² All mission fields, ploughed in lines and single-cropped, were intended to represent a contrast to those seen in the reserves. Going out from Mrewa Mission "when I was still a schoolchild, you

⁵¹ I. Chimboza and E. Chimboza, personal interview, 10 March 1998.

⁵² E. Sisimayi, personal interview, 25 February 1998.

would find that the seeds were scattered. They were not well organized in lines so that people would cultivate in between. There was a very big difference.”⁵³

These circumstances produced a variety of dynamics with surrounding communities. In some instances, “tenants were looked at by the rural farmers as people who were different from themselves, because of the way they were doing things and because they were not being supervised by the government officials.”⁵⁴ This perception of an essentially protected status could occasionally generate resentment as demands on farmers in the reserves became more onerous. Yet the tenants did not always perceive mission authority as beneficially mediating against state intervention in their community. Relations between landlord and tenant could occasionally turn sour.

Data concerning rent-related disputes does exist but remains scarce. At least three incidences occurred at Nyakatsapa between 1939–1942. The first instance drew official attention when one tenant would neither pay rent nor dip his cattle. One year later, another tenant not only refused to pay rent, but also claimed exemption from government taxation. By November, 1942 the number of non-paying tenants had increased, including some who were two years behind. It appears the extent of missionary response varied. District superintendent Rev. M.J. Murphree submitted the first farmer’s name to the Umtali Native Commissioner with a request for his removal from the farm. Murphree also wrote the veterinary

⁵³ D. Kanyimo, personal interview, 4 March 1998.

⁵⁴ M. Chambara, personal interview, 24 February 1998.

department since "it may be that they will wish to prosecute him for failing to dip his cattle."⁵⁵ The other incidents only resulted in the assessment of a late fee.

At several points in the 1950s, tenants at Nyakatsapa refused to pay rent as required by their leases. In arguing against further payment, they compared their situation to farmers in the surrounding reserves who occupied land without charge. The benefits of tenant farming outside the limitations faced by reserve farmers seemed elusive. Leaseholders maintained that the limited security of tenure offered by their rental agreements did not justify the rates they paid. If their situation under this lease did not set them apart from general conditions in the reserves, what were they paying for? Nyakatsapa tenants felt they received too little return on this investment. However, mission authorities stood firm and maintained any tenant not paying rent should leave.

Whatever tensions emerged over the pattern of settlement on these tenant farms, there were substantial differences from farming conditions in the reserves. Tenants could access any mission irrigation systems and frequently found more regular transportation to markets. Leaseholders at Nyakatsapa and Arnoldine faced neither forced relocation through widespread centralization nor direct supervision from government agricultural agents. Contributions from these households supported the church and its pastor, as no separate mission fields existed. Therefore, the statistics on farm income differentials remain somewhat deceptive, although they no doubt give an idea about general conditions at each mission. To provide a more accurate impression of relative farm productivity, however, would at

⁵⁵ OMA file A24: M.J. Murphree to NC Mutare, 24 August 1939; NC Mutare to M.J. Murphree, 8 November 1940; H.E. Taylor to Patrick Machiri, 10 November 1942.

least require comparison of the total agricultural income for all tenant households against the total farm income of the larger centers. Such figures do not seem to exist. Yet to dismiss tenant production as inconsequential because it did not figure directly into church income figures fails to provide an accurate picture of farm utilization. It seems quite possible that mission tenant fields may have generated higher yields per acre than their more commercially-run counterparts.

During this period, the farming practices of tenants also caused concern as all missions came under increasing government scrutiny regarding their conservation policies. Many of the twenty-seven tenant families on Arnoldine farm appeared to be cultivating as many as fifteen acres of low-fertility soil. Tenants eventually came under mission agricultural committee scrutiny because "they were not looking after the soil and people were just cutting trees. . ."⁵⁶ By 1954, the Conference Agricultural Survey had to recommend taking large portions of these fields out of production since the "present practice is a form of land mining without returning food to the soil."⁵⁷ Similar problems existed on tiny Glenada farm, where most of the eleven tenants families depended upon the income from outside employment rather than living off their plots. The survey team concluded this had become a necessity due to the low fertility on the farm and was adversely affecting tenant attitudes. Nyakatsapa farm, the largest of these tenant farms, received particular attention because, unlike Arnoldine or Glenada, it bordered both reserve and purchase area lands. Therefore, mission authorities felt it offered the best

⁵⁶ E. Sisimayi, personal interview, 25 February 1998.

⁵⁷ OMA file A24: Conference Agricultural Survey for Field Committee (August 1954) 17.

opportunity for “demonstrations of Christian community living” as well as potentially the most public example of the mission’s failure to properly utilize its holdings.⁵⁸

Leases for the eighty regular Nyakatsapa tenants had called for thirty days of conservation work (at 6d/day) per annum. However, this policy usually went unobserved. Rather, “by mutual agreement” each tenant provided one day of work per week without pay. As late as 1954, tenant attitudes were reported as cooperative and enthused. Yet the mission still experienced problems of hillside cultivation without the construction of storm drains or contour ridges. After warnings, the AMEC agricultural committee took action through the Agricultural Department to expel these families from the mission. These threats of removal achieved compliance once the tenants had seen that “it was going to be very difficult for them to leave Nyakatsapa for an unknown place, because the government had not prepared a place for them to go. . . .”⁵⁹

Tenants’ animal husbandry practices also drew official attention. Approximately 1500 acres at Arnoldine provided reasonable grazing, but mission agriculturalists showed concern that pasture quality should limit stock holdings to one animal per twenty-five acres. However, 1954 herd totals revealed that livestock density had reached one animal per ten acres. Nyakatsapa also faced a similar situation, with over 300 cattle grazing on 2400 acres of “poor quality” pasturage. For mission agriculturalists, the intermixture of grazing areas with arable lands only

⁵⁸ UMCA file 1459-2-2:54: Report on Nyakatsapa Rural Training Center, 1959.

⁵⁹ E. Sisimayi, personal interview, 25 February 1998.

made pasture rotation and control more problematic. At both sites, it appeared that “the land is being rapidly over grazed. . .”⁶⁰ Tenants thereafter received constant encouragement to undertake the mission-sponsored four year course of on-the-farm training. A new rental rate went into effect in 1955, intended to subsidize a full-time agricultural demonstrator who would “be able to lead our people there along the paths of righteousness in farming practices!”⁶¹

Those who completed the new course would receive a Master Farmer certificate from the government. This marked the beginning of a new phase in the utilization of mission lands. At Arnoldine and Nyakatsapa, officials expected tenants to undergo this training as part of their responsible use of mission lands. Missionaries expected such programs to produce multiple benefits. The intensive methods proscribed under the plan would generate additional household incomes while lessening government scrutiny of conservation issues on these lands. Furthermore, as a state-sponsored program, a certain low-level promotion surrounded the awarding of such certificates that could publicly support missionary claims of progressive land use under their administration. AMEC officials attempted to showcase this commitment to the ideals of the Master Farmer program by initiating the Methodist Rural Industrial Department (MRID) at Old Umtali. They divided a large section of the mission farm into small plots and invited interested farmers for on-site training courses. This instruction would last two years, focusing on meeting the requirements for the government certificate.

⁶⁰ OMA file A24: Conference Agricultural Survey for Field Committee (August 1954) 25.

⁶¹ OMA: The Methodist Church, Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1955) 372.

But during the next several years, government attention to erosion on both tenant farms only increased. By 1959 the Conference agricultural committee felt compelled to create a sub-committee tasked with meeting the Nyakatsapa tenants in order to place incentives to better farming within the regular lease.⁶² One outcome of this action called for each tenant farmer to provide fourteen days of free labor to the farm per annum, “in any work connected with the improvements of the said mission land. . . .” Income from rentals and fees would “be utilised for the benefit of such tenants on the said farms. . . .”⁶³ The lease limited cattle ownership to four per household. Despite these seemingly vocal intentions to reform tenant agriculture, it appears that no household ever left Nyakatsapa due to unfit farming practices. Beer drinking and marital difficulties were more likely to receive attention from mission authorities.⁶⁴

Still, the tenant response to new provisions in their lease seems mixed at best. The same year, residents requested a change in their lease relative to additional free time for off-farm work. The agreement required the tenant’s presence on the farm from 1 October to 30 May annually, except by special permission. Part-time work outside the mission could only occur with written consent from the mission. Tenants clearly desired access to more cash income than they could earn from their own fields. But mission authorities actually hoped to

⁶² OMA: The Methodist Church, Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1959) 381.

⁶³ W. Kinyon and Mai S. Chigumira. “Lease Agreement for Farmers at Nyakatsapa,” 31 July 1958. Photocopy in author’s possession.

⁶⁴ E.C. Makunike, personal interview, 17 March 1998.

control this potential rise in absentee households by presenting a leatherwork home industry program “as an alternative for greatly increasing their income.”⁶⁵ The tenants’ responded to such suggestions with something less than enthusiasm. Under these extended tensions, labor for agricultural improvement projects on the station was not readily forthcoming. In 1962, the agricultural committee had to propose that “this labor in the future should be of a more voluntary nature. It will be stressed that it is community development instead of free labor.”⁶⁶

For the AMEC missions operating in rural locales, the yearly survival of their enterprise remained directly linked to the agricultural economy. Outlying churches and schools existed solely on the tithing contributions of their mostly peasant farming congregations. Parents’ ability to pay school fees often depended solely on their success at producing under the environmental and economic constraints of segregated land apportionment. Mission officials also relied upon station farms to provide boarding rations and supplemental cash income for each center, regardless of their particular physical or economic geography. However, seasonal weather variations and a lack of management continuity often made for erratic annual returns. AMEC proscriptions against seeking credit frustrated various individual efforts to transform some farms into commercially viable entities. When harvest proceeds exceeded farm running costs, profits frequently found their way

⁶⁵ OMA: The Methodist Church, Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1959) 381.

⁶⁶ OMA: The Methodist Church, Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1962) 105.

into other areas of expenditure instead of furthering mission agricultural development.

By the onset of this period, mission farms contained a variety of distinct communities. Despite AMEC agricultural ideals, most missionaries found themselves heavily occupied with evangelical and educational tasks. Teachers and hospital staff, although allowed limited access to mission land, obviously could not engage in anything approaching full-time farming. Along with employed farm laborers, they sought to reduce household expenditures or even generate income through more intensive garden production. Students frequently found their role limited to that of unpaid laborers, but with the fields they cultivated, they largely fed themselves and lessened parental expenses. However, given their different situations, none of these communities really embodied the complete AMEC package of a rural Christian farming family.

Tenant farms such as Arnoldine and Nyakatsapa appeared to offer the best opportunity for creating new identities on both household and community levels. Through the formation of these small enclaves on church property, missionaries hoped for increased influence over residents' agricultural and social practices. Moral and economic behavior would come under official purview as lease agreements attempted to control a variety of tenant activities. However, tenants clearly held their own agendas in moving onto mission lands. While some desired a new form of Christian society, others sought better educational opportunities or access to available acreage removed from the constraints of reserve farming. Tenants also recognized their own important role in maintaining a public image of

suitable land utilization on AMEC farms. This knowledge at times provided them with power in negotiating the implementation of mission policy on the tenant farms.

CHAPTER 5

THE WORLD THE STUDENTS MADE: AGRICULTURE AND LABOR IN MISSION EDUCATION

The nature of the intellectual advance to be aimed at should be one of which advantage can be taken in the ordinary daily lives of the people, and should be a step forward in a field already familiar to them, rather than a violent transition into fields which belong to a different type of civilization. As the life of African peoples is to a preponderating extent agricultural, education should aim at making them better agriculturalists and better able to appreciate all the natural processes with which agriculture is connected.¹

This chapter continues looking at agriculture in the mission economy but more closely targets the experiences of students with farming at mission institutions. Like most missions of this era, AMEC stations (particularly those with boarding schools) incorporated substantial amounts of agricultural work into their curriculum. Farm production utilizing these student workers helped defray cash expenses. While student labor figured prominently in calculations of station self-sufficiency, missionaries also hoped agricultural training would instill ideas about stewardship and the value of labor. Consequently, both AMEC agricultural and industrial programs drew heavily for their inspiration upon the philosophy of teaching by doing, reflecting the general sentiment that “manual labor is one of the items that holds our people to usefulness.”² Therefore, AMEC missions attempted to provide

¹ NAZ file S RH 179: Southern Rhodesia Missionary Conference, Proceedings (Salisbury, 1930) 13. Opening Address of Governor Sir Cecil Rodwell.

² OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1944) 27.

(at least until the 1950's) the type of education which might enable the African student "to take his place in life, a life which is and will continue to be predominantly and intensely rural and agricultural."³ Yet evidence reveals that pupils and parents usually had their own priorities that could result in conflict with mission authorities. By the early 1960s, continued student pressure and significant changes in the broader political economy of Southern Rhodesia would necessitate a general rethinking of mission education policy.

As official attention towards African agricultural methods expanded during the 1930s, missions found themselves frequently at odds with government education policies. Agricultural activities at mission schools fell under the ultimate supervision of the Native Education Department (NED). Certainly, some missions received praise from government officials who noted differences between the methods of former commercial farm workers and mission converts. The farm workers stood accused of reverting to "primitive methods" while there were "pleasing instances of complete reversal in method by natives who have received sustained instruction from missionaries."⁴ At the 1939 joint conference for mission representatives and state education inspectors, however, the NED introduced a contentious issue concerning the farming practices of kraal schools and teachers. Mr. Davies of the Agricultural Department referred to the unsatisfactory methods employed by teachers and evangelists in their garden plots, even suggesting that

³ OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1945) 95.

⁴ Southern Rhodesia, Report of the Commission appointed to enquire into the matter of Native Education in all its bearing in the Colony of Southern Rhodesia (Salisbury: Government Printer, 1925) 9.

schools might find themselves subject to grant reductions if they did not adopt the proper four-year rotation.⁵

Thereafter, evangelists, teachers, and general mission staff would face pressure from to put their plots under approved tillage methods. NED officials frequently commented on the failure of outstation pastor-teachers to adopt proper agricultural practices despite their awareness of the benefits involved. At Muradzikwa school earlier in the year, NED inspector J.H. Farquhar found the garden of the evangelist quite disappointing, although it did demonstrate “that good methods pay and poor ones don’t. . .it is unfortunate, however, that the evangelist’s garden should serve this purpose.”⁶ Despite having taught new methods of agriculture in the schools for some time, missionaries grudgingly agreed with NED officials that church and school personnel were not using approved methods. While largely agreeing on this basic conclusion, missionary responses varied.

Rev. T.A. O’Farrell , the AMEC representative to the 1939 joint conference, commented on the likelihood that if a teacher actually cultivated a five-acre plot properly, he would have little time remaining for school-related tasks. Given the budgetary constraints facing mission schools at all levels, teachers and staff were already too overburdened to reasonably meet such requirements. The Wesleyan Methodist missionary Herbert Carter also pointed to the difficulty of requiring such improvements from teachers who often lacked cattle and held no permanent status

⁵ NAZ file CNC S235/492: Native Affairs Department, “Minutes of the 1939 Joint Conference of Inspectors and Representatives of the Missionary Conference,” 16-17.

⁶ OMA file 145: J.H. Farquhar to E.L. Sells, 27 April 1939. This report also mentions one evangelist who “although he knows good methods pay, prefers a large area cultivated in the traditional manner.”

on mission lands. Most representatives felt such punitive action would directly harm the missions since teachers' contract appointments made it impossible to reduce their salaries. With such a disparity of views, the conference participants could only manage to resolve "that it is desirable to add incentives to raising the standard of agriculture in kraal school rotational crop gardens and in the lands cultivated by kraal school teachers."⁷

Some incentive came in personal responsibility for a potentially negative agricultural inspection report. At Mutambara, teachers agreed to follow the standards in place for reserve farmers and mission officials requested visits from the reserve agricultural demonstrator. In some instances, teachers actually fell under the immediate supervision of the mission agricultural instructor. One unmarried female teacher was warned, "if you are to get food from the mission land, you had better comply with the regulations, those regulating teachers' fields on the mission, because we don't want a bad report that could spoil the report on the farm."⁸ Mission authorities sought to make the entirety of agricultural operations occurring on their land into a complete example of both productive commercial farming and intensive smallholder cropping. This would eventually lead to the imposition of specific farming requirements for all mission schoolteachers and staff.

⁷ NAZ file CNC S235/492: Native Affairs Department, "Minutes of the 1939 Joint Conference of Inspectors and Representatives of the Missionary Conference," 16-17. This situation persisted, causing one official to comment years later that "agriculture work at kraal schools is still the most unpopular of subjects. This state of affairs, I fear, can be laid at the door of many of the teachers. Agricultural field work is termed *base* [work] by most of the teachers and pupils. . . ." NAZ file S1563: NC Mrewa to CNC, Annual Report (1945).

⁸ E. Sisimayi, personal interview, 25 February 1998.

In 1945, the district superintendent instructed AMEC teachers in Umtali district to remain with no more than ten cattle and thirty small livestock. Domestic requirements would determine proper acreages for cultivation.⁹ While teachers were to present an exemplary two acre rotation plot, it seems clear that mission officials worried about potential conflicts between more extensive farming and teaching duties. This conflict between teaching and farming responsibilities had become evident years earlier. Limited land allocations for school sites sometimes resulted in competition for access within the immediate school community. In 1940, teachers at Murari school apparently sought access to arable lands outside the grounds. However, the Department of Native Lands warned mission officials that this was in fact crown land, even suggesting installation of a wire fence around the school perimeter.¹⁰ When coupled with low teacher salaries, the increasingly limited availability of arable land could also intensify pressure on school resources and affect agricultural instruction. Most school staff attempted to control their food expenditures through garden plot cultivation. After visiting Munyarari school in 1951, the NED circuit inspector noted that the school garden was “well cared for, but it is not big enough for the number of pupils. Another acre should be added at the expense of the teachers’ and minister’s gardens.”¹¹

Lack of a proper balance would result in Rev. M.E. Culver’s fear “that the Church is working against the schools and neglecting their Christian opportunities

⁹ OMA file 145: Methodist Church (Umtali District), “Instructions and Rules for Teachers,” 1945.

¹⁰ OMA file 145: Asst. Director of Native Lands to Mission Superintendent (Old Umtali), 10 May 1940.

¹¹ NAZ file S1012/ED 1-3: Office of the Circuit Inspector (NED), 2 April 1951.

when it comes to being stewards of the land. . . very few of our church leaders, ministers, evangelists. . . are taking the proper care of their land.”¹² Missionaries hoped increased efforts would make mission lands and schools places of convincing example, showing that the church produced good stewards of the land. This would enable both nearby communities and students to see “good farming” so that they could “add this to their conception of right living.” Mission farming efforts had broader implications, as the land was “closely watched and the water used on it jealously regarded by our neighbors and since pupils learn by contrasting what they are told with what they see. . . .”¹³ The Conference Board of Lay Activities naturally felt that teachers and ministers should lead the people in these efforts. This applied to paid mission employees as well, but the Board recommended that such staff should keep their efforts on a small scale so that farm work would not interfere with church or school work.¹⁴ Mission officials thus recognized the difficulties inherent in requiring specific agricultural methods for people who occupied mission lands but were neither professional nor full-time farmers.

Missionaries at Old Umtali had restructured the work on the mission farm in accordance with the half-day of labor demanded from all boarding students by 1910. At Mrewa, the mission ploughed fifty acres and “training in better methods of agriculture was given while at the same time the crops provided food for the

¹² OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1947) 384.

¹³ OMA file African Advance: Report to Interpret the Specific Details of Non-recurring Askings for Executive Committee Consideration, 7 October 1954, 3.

¹⁴ OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1947) 422.

school.”¹⁵ Subsequent timetables allowed for part of the pupils to go to school in the morning and work in the afternoon while others worked during morning sessions and attended classes in the afternoon. Within this basic division, classes split up further such that half of the pupils engaged in agricultural tasks while the rest found themselves doing carpentry, building, and campus maintenance. Assignments were made in two-week periods, alternating between these two divisions of work.¹⁶ This schedule attempted to provide students with experience in many types of work while ensuring that all jobs around the mission station carried on continuously. Mission policy deemed this type of instructional timetable essential to the continued operation of the central schools. Vocational classes were to be linked with the required general work in mission fields and/or shops. J.T. Thacker, the agricultural missionary at Old Umtali, reiterated the point in 1947: “we can do much talking in the classrooms about the work of the hands, but we must let the students learn by actually doing the work.” His vision of vocational education incorporated both self-sufficiency and student labor. Therefore, when not in the classroom, All pupils were to be found “busy at a worthwhile job in which he or she is interested to the extent that the successful completion of the task is the most important outcome of the work.”¹⁷ The AMEC missions thereby hoped to produce a cohort of graduates with basic farming, building and maintenance skills for church and home.¹⁸

¹⁵ James 65.

¹⁶ Sells 43.

¹⁷ OMA file 145: J.T. Thacker, “Financing a Mission Program,” presented to Agricultural Field Committee (1947) 10-14.

¹⁸Edgington 192.

The success of mission schools and farms thus ultimately depended upon student labor. Many of the earliest pupils at Old Umtali only attended school after being hired by the mission as laborers.¹⁹ Corresponding imperatives of ensuring both greater school enrollment and the availability of farm labor then resulted in the acceptance of pupils from poorer households, contingent upon completion of a three or six month work contract. Rev. Jonah Chitombo recalled when he began school in 1911, “one could work at the mission farm and then afterwards could go to school where he would not pay any fees.”²⁰ After arriving from Mutambara in 1923, Solomon Machingura worked for six months in the fields at Old Umtali before being admitted to standard three classes.²¹ Many of Esinati Chimboza’s classmates at Fairfield Girls’ School (Old Umtali) stayed for three months after the end of classes in 1927 to work for the upcoming year’s fees.²² Ernest Sisimayi worked at Mutambara for six months, performing both field and general work, prior to becoming a day scholar in 1930. He remembered “quite a number of boys” doing the same thing to earn school fees. Sisimayi later worked for the mission, supervising crews of incoming students trying to earn their fees. He was able to save enough to further his education at the government agricultural training institute in Domboshawa.²³

¹⁹ Zvobgo 171. For several early years, the only way to get students was “to hire them to work at the mission and then teach them for an hour each day in the classroom.”

²⁰ NAZ file AOH/61: Oral Testimony of Reverend Jonah Tarwiwa Chitombo, September 1979.

²¹ NAZ file AOH/50: Oral Testimony of Solomon Chada Machingura, February 1979.

²² I. Chimboza and E. Chimboza, personal interview, 10 March 1998.

²³ E. Sisimayi, personal interview, 25 February 1998.

The role of the mission as a labor market emerges from the convergence of farm labor requirements with missionary disdain for migrant labor and urban life. This policy meant to supply missions with labor and keep young Africans out of the migrant system, but it also provided an alternative economic strategy for some households otherwise unable to invest in education. While a preliminary service period in lieu of fee payment seems to have disappeared by the end of the 1930s, many pupils' experience with mission education clearly began as laborers, not as students. Some scholars have therefore argued that mission farm dependence upon cheap labor reflected the general structure of colonial society in southern Africa.²⁴ At Old Umtali, for example, mission officials had set aside nearly 200 acres of the farm for student production by the mid-1930s. Approximately 160 male boarding students provided most of the labor in keeping 110 acres under a four-year rotation (maize, sunhemp, maize, legume). The remaining ninety acres consisted of demonstration plots of ensilage, alfalfa, oats, sweet potatoes, and vegetables. Married pupils assigned to agriculture spent most of the time on their own plots, growing their own food.²⁵ A later assessment of the Mutambara operations reported only ten laborers were employed on the farm, "which if operated by a private individual, would require approximately thirty."²⁶ The balance consisted of student labor.

²⁴ Edginton 265.

²⁵ Sells 41-43.

²⁶ OMA file A24: Conference Agricultural Survey for Field Committee (August 1954) 10.

Successful production on mission farms helped support the schools by preventing drastic increases in boarding fees and was intended to demonstrate the potential of modern agricultural methods. Hikes in school fees could dramatically impact church operations, as was the case near Nyadiri in 1948. A dispute over fee payment in Uzumba South reserve resulted in an extended drop of church attendance as the community met instead to discuss monetary issues. According to Rev. Samuel Munjoma, people eventually became angry enough to burn down the minister's house while its occupants slept.²⁷ Agricultural performance, both on the mission and in surrounding communities, would regularly impact the stability and success of mission educational efforts.

Agricultural coursework (as opposed to “general work”) normally began during primary school, with pastor-teachers providing basic instruction through their own plots and gardens. When pupils arrived at the central mission schools, boys continued with agriculture through standard three. At this point, agricultural instruction for girls shifted principally towards vegetable gardening.²⁸ In standard four, boys learned to divide a single planting bed into sections appropriate for the basic crop rotation. Classroom lessons covered maize, root crop, and legume cultivation. As part of the required curriculum, students needed to pass both the theoretical and practical government examinations in agriculture before moving on to standard five. In the last two years of primary education, expectations grew as the older pupils became responsible for three entire beds under rotation. Planting and

²⁷ OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1948) 66-67.

²⁸ Sells 41-43.

cultivating occasionally took place by mechanical means, but was more often performed by student labor under missionary supervision. In 1953, the boys' agriculture classes at Old Umtali were even assigned a "proper school farm" of sixty acres.²⁹ Male students also did courses in forestry and fruit horticulture during these last years.

Instruction for animal husbandry and dairy production followed a similar pattern: "needless to say, not all the boys looked forward to swine care and management, especially on cleaning days."³⁰ Pupils also aided in the construction of irrigation works, as at Old Umtali where they enjoyed the "rich experiences" of digging furrows and patching pipe leaks.³¹ When asked about her primary school experiences with agriculture, Doris Kanyimo remembered that "students were occupied the whole year round."³² During the first term, while the rains still fell, students would cultivate and weed the existing beds in preparation for the harvest in second term. Preparing the beds for planting occupied most of third term. In addition, pupils spent many hours in the mission fields, contributing their labor to the maize production so important to the missions' daily boarding operations. At Mtoko Mission, the 1.5 acre garden was "large enough to provide plots for every one of the school children and provides the required vegetables for the boarding

²⁹ OMA: The Methodist Church, Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1953) 156.

³⁰ OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1942) 236.

³¹ OMA file 521: Tudor Roberts, "Account of G.A. Roberts Life," (1972) 2.

³² D. Kanyimo, personal interview, 4 March 1998.

department.”³³ Some students found additional income through working in their teachers’ fields and gardens. Students may have sought such employment precisely because it provided a small income outside the purview of parental or missionary authority.³⁴

However, mission agricultural education frequently suffered from a lack of coordination between the seasonal demands of farming and the students’ schedule. Peak work load periods could correspond with school holidays. By 1939, mission representatives were even suggesting extension of the school year to 200 days and reduction of the Christmas holiday to four weeks as partial solution to their labor difficulties. Rev. T.A. O’Farrell argued that ending the academic year in December would inevitably cut every agricultural year in squarely in half.³⁵ In order to cope with these circumstances, a certain number of students inevitably remained on campus over holidays as paid laborers. Usually, these workers came from families having trouble paying their annual school fees. Doris Kanyimo therefore recalled this as a positive opportunity for many, since “at that time it was very difficult to get money for children to be educated, so the parents would not object. The principal would arrange that those who were willing remained during the holidays so they would pay their fees.”³⁶ But at Mutambara, a difficult holiday labor situation

³³ OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1943) 287.

³⁴ T. Makuwatsine, personal interview, 30 January 1998. He remembered fellow pupils in the 1950s using this money “to pay for their sports gear and their Christmas parties.”

³⁵ NAZ file CNC S235/492: Native Affairs Department, “Minutes of the 1939 Joint Conference of Inspectors and Representatives of the Missionary Conference,” 18-19.

³⁶ D. Kanyimo, personal interview, 4 March 1998.

eventually required all male boarding students to stay one holiday with pay and food provided. In addition, twenty night school pupils stayed two holidays per year.³⁷ Elsewhere that year, missionaries complained “it is difficult to require boys to stay during holidays during which much of the peak load work is being done. This is especially true during the December holiday when parents want their children home to help with the weeding in the fields.”³⁸

Clearly, although providing an opportunity to earn school fees, this practice affected the availability of household labor during crucial periods of the agricultural year. Those households having difficulty with school fees were probably also the most vulnerable to a shortage of agricultural labor. Some missionaries also viewed this sort of arrangement as less than ideal for their farm operations, since the student labor force during holidays remained “inadequate and expensive in terms of how much they do.”³⁹ This situation reflected the more general difficulties with an over-reliance on student labor. While cheap in initial costs, workforce turnover could disrupt continuity and productivity per worker remained low.

At Old Umtali, the lengthy distance from classrooms to the main farm fields only exacerbated scheduling problems during the school day, further hindering an operation dependent upon students to provide a steady source of farm labor. Yet at other times in the year, NED officials found missionaries reportedly having difficulty locating “full employment” for all the students in crop-related activities.

³⁷ OMA file A24: Conference Agricultural Survey for Field Committee (August 1954) 10.

³⁸ OMA file A24: Conference Agricultural Survey for Field Committee (August 1954) 15. The report on Old Umtali farmlands also concluded that holiday labor supplies were unreliable “because of the fathers’ influence.”

³⁹ OMA file A24: Conference Agricultural Survey for Field Committee (August 1954) 15.

During these times, the NED had “no objections to them being used on other agricultural projects such as vegetable gardening, road construction. . .layout of grounds, etc.”⁴⁰ Indeed, the category of general work could subsume virtually any manual task related to the development or maintenance of the mission. According to Noah Muswe, a pupil at Nyadiri in the 1930s, “we had no choice. . .all of us had to work. . .there was always work at the mission!”⁴¹ Despite recounting a certain level of student resentment during their years at mission schools, many informants today appear to remember their agricultural training with some fondness. In hindsight, Timothy Makuwatsine concluded that “we did not know it was going to help us later in life. As with all children, we used to complain about work. We did not go to work smiling.”⁴²

The frequent variation in mission pupils’ farming backgrounds could expose social and economic differentiation in the surrounding rural communities. Ernest Sisimayi described the type of farm work expected at mission schools as “strictly African.” Of his early student days at Mutambara (1930-32), he remembered when it came to weeding during general work hours, “we found it very easy in comparison to the other students whose parents were civilized and had better methods of cultivation. They had ploughs, they had cultivators. We had to weed by hand and hoe. But when it came to school, it was very strenuous work. . .we didn’t

⁴⁰ OMA file 145: NED Industrial Education Inspector (P.H. Patterson) to W. Kinyon, 23 January 1952.

⁴¹ N. Muswe, personal interview, 5 March 1998.

⁴² T. Makuwatsine, personal interview, 30 January 1998.

find it hard at all.”⁴³ Agriculture classes also tended to differentiate the day scholars from boarding students. Day scholars often took home the products of their instructional plots, thereby contributing to their households’ economy. These students thus had more than simply the incentive of grades to take agriculture class seriously. Boarding students, however, saw their yields funneled into the general school food supplies that fed all boarders. Some day scholars even went to the extent of carrying a bit of manure from home each day until they accumulated enough to fertilize their beds. Boarding students found themselves forced to rely upon a less potent composted green manure that they had to generate from leaves and grass. But perhaps most significantly, boarding students were expected to undertake additional work on the mission farm to offset ever mounting educational costs.

At primary schools, boys and girls usually worked together in the same fields during their general agriculture class periods. But at boarding facilities such as Old Umtali or Mutambara, the girls’ school maintained its own fields and figured separately in budget calculations. In providing training for rural Christian women, Rev. George Roberts maintained “we must not allow our schools to get too quickly away from the manual labor that keeps native women healthy and strong, and happy with the idea that they are producing food for their families.”⁴⁴ Several years later, he attested to the important role of the mission churches in bringing

⁴³ E. Sisimayi, personal interview, 25 February 1998.

⁴⁴ OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1940) 39.

women “to their rightful place in family life.”⁴⁵ As part of a broader curriculum, the agricultural program for girls did more than anticipate a domestic future for female graduates, it attempted to ensure one. While boys gradually moved on to various classes in field crop production and animal husbandry, agricultural instruction for girls continued to focus on vegetable gardens. The broader industrial curriculum for girls usually emphasized household tasks such as needlework, cooking and laundry. According to Vena Maforo, at Mrewa mission in the 1940s “we were taught to sew and to knit. . .up to this day I can knit. . .some girls were taught to do laundry for the missionaries.”⁴⁶ In 1941, Roberts summarized the AMEC philosophy of domestic education for African women rather succinctly: “we feel that it is an important thing to improve the girls’ abilities in making luxury out of the products at hand and to train a lot of girls who will be efficient wives.”⁴⁷ Casual labor was also expected from women residing on the mission, especially the wives of the farm workers “who understand, upon entering employment, that they must help in the peak load work.”⁴⁸

The AMEC evidence resonates closely with Elizabeth Schmidt’s data from Chishawasha (Roman Catholic) and Epworth (Wesleyan Methodist) missions, revealing how much of missionary education for African girls revolved around the

⁴⁵ OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1945) 99.

⁴⁶ V. Maforo, personal interview, 11 March 1998. See also Edgington, 280.

⁴⁷ OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1941) 132.

⁴⁸ OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1941) 15.

creation of Christian wives as suitable companions for the expanding ranks of male school graduates. Mission agricultural training thus became part of an education which promoted the domestication of African women “in ways that were quite compatible with the needs of colonial capital and the state.”⁴⁹ AMEC mission education certainly emphasized male authority and specific female roles. As in other denominations, boys were taught to be household heads while girls “learned that it was their duty to stay at home, cooking and cleaning, raising healthy Christian children, and respecting and obeying their husbands.”⁵⁰ Therefore, as female students advanced towards standard six, their agricultural training focused more intently on vegetable production for household consumption.

This domestic scenario emerged perhaps most distinctly at Old Umtali with the construction of a “model African home” for Fairfield Girl’s School in 1941. Girls participated in the planting of kitchen and flower gardens, painting and white-washing, hanging pictures, and making small cupboards. Accordingly, “the aim has been simplicity and nothing has been done that they could not duplicate in their own homes.”⁵¹ The six week “model home” unit then required each pupil to partner with another girl and temporarily adopt an infant from the mission orphanage. The school did not supply any food, instead providing an allowance of £1/10- for three weeks. One girl managed food purchases and cooking for this period while the other remained responsible for the child. After three weeks they would reverse roles

⁴⁹ Schmidt 122.

⁵⁰ Schmidt 122.

⁵¹ OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1941) 143.

so that "they all get a chance to learn how to spend money wisely, as well as what the running of a home amounts to."⁵² Any surplus egg production from their efforts in the poultry run or extra vegetables from the garden could be sold and the proceeds added to their allowance. However, prior to spending any money for household expenses, the program required girls to set aside their tithe to offer for church and mission.

Despite the implications of such programs, the intention of AMEC mission education policy was not to produce male wage laborers who left their wives behind to bear the social costs of reproduction. In contrast to Schmidt's description of this process, the ideal model presented to AMEC students and congregations was based upon an intact family wherein men produced sufficient marketable surpluses and women efficiently managed domestic affairs. AMEC mission schools consistently sought to prepare their students for a successful rural future, away from the corrupt influence of the cities and under continued mission community supervision. That many converts would not be able to completely reconstruct this lifestyle, instead effectively becoming migrant laborers leaving behind single-parent households, reflects the real power of state and capital imperatives more than any specified goal of AMEC education.

Given the realities of colonial land and labor policies, whereby conditions gradually worsened for most rural producers, mission students viewed the AMEC model as increasingly unattainable. Many students eventually came to the point of believing they had come to school to learn and failed to find much value in such

⁵² OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1941) 143.

manual tasks. Industrial training frequently failed to move beyond unskilled labor towards legitimate instruction in a skilled trade.⁵³ Perhaps the earliest serious indictment came from one inspector of schools in 1924. He warned that for agricultural training, unless "the practical side of the work keeps pace with the theoretical side, the latter becomes useless if not positively harmful."⁵⁴ His report continued by denigrating the woodworking classes taught by F.G. Mauger, who could not produce a syllabus and then admitted he had not followed one. Students apparently recognized that learning theoretical concepts in the classroom did not necessarily alter their experience as laborers. By 1943, Old Umtali industrial instructor W. Hamrick admitted, "we are constantly striving to get the boys to look upon their work as real training that they can use now and later, and not to consider it as just more work to be done."⁵⁵ Even when some larger mission farms eventually mechanized aspects of their operation, student farming experiences revolved around the idea that many of them would not have access to such equipment upon returning to their parents' household.

The Conference Agricultural Survey of 1954 also assessed pupil attitudes, reporting "students feel that they have come here to learn and that they do not learn much when put to such manual tasks as hoeing."⁵⁶ But pupil resistance to required manual tasks went beyond a simple desire for a more academic training. Many also

⁵³ Edgington 192:259. He also suggests that despite the work they performed, boarding pupils constantly sought to differentiate themselves from ordinary hired laborers.

⁵⁴ Zvobgo 240.

⁵⁵ OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1943) 297.

⁵⁶ OMA file A24: Conference Agricultural Survey for Field Committee (August 1954) 15.

questioned management of the farming enterprise in which their labor played a crucial role. By this point, mission center policy had shifted such that the purpose of agriculture on school lands became primarily instructional rather than a source of foodstuffs. At Old Umtali livestock had first priority on grain produced in mission fields. The remainder was sold at market prices to reduce overall running costs of the farm. But students failed to see the practical benefits of working a large mission farm if it no longer supplied them with food. The issue was hardly new. A decade earlier, W. Hamrick had observed pupil attitudes towards the farm, concluding, “they want production rather than education.”⁵⁷

AMEC missionaries also resisted NED pressure for changes in the school curriculum and timetable. By the early 1950's, the NED had moved away from its earlier emphasis upon industrial education and instead seemed focused on reducing the amount of time devoted to such subjects within mission schools. While classroom instruction for industrial subjects would continue, the long standing category of “general work” faced elimination. Rev. M.J. Murphree considered such changes impossible without a substantial increase in boarding school fees. He argued that government grants combined with pupil fees remained insufficient to provide food for the boarding school. The difference could only be surmounted through ‘general work’ applied to the growing of food. This situation led the AMEC Conference Field Committee to conclude that the large mission farm would no longer be of any value for school demonstrations “because the school curriculum

⁵⁷ OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1943) 297.

and timetable for agriculture does not allow for its effective usage. . . .”⁵⁸ Murphree clearly opposed this trend towards increased government control over the curriculum, viewing NED inspectors as “more and more dictatorial in details connected with the running of the school, which are outside their sphere of responsibility.”⁵⁹ He felt any dependency upon government grants should not cause missions to fail in upholding the ideals of their faith. But in an attempt to deflect some of this pressure, he had placed successive motions before the Conference Field Committee requesting an increase in boarding fees. Since the Field Committee voted these down two consecutive years, Murphree eventually wrote the NED inspector that until such a motion passed, he saw “no way of feeding these boys except that they get out there in those vegetable gardens and help grow the food.”⁶⁰

The tension between maintaining farm production levels, reluctant student labor, and government attempts to regulate schools more closely even caused Murphree to consider an appeal to parents.⁶¹ The previous seasons since a severe drought in 1947 had been marginal for most families. Murphree recognized the

⁵⁸ OMA file A24: Conference Agricultural Survey for Field Committee (August 1954) 16.

⁵⁹ OMA file African Advance: M.J. Murphree to Bishop N.S. Booth, 14 March 1951.

⁶⁰ OMA file African Advance: M.J. Murphree to Umtali Circuit Inspector, 13 February 1951. Remarks Murphree drafted for a meeting with Governor Sir John Kennedy also reveal his position: “In more recent years the Native Education Department of the government has been emphasizing more and more the academic side of education at the expense of training in industrial subjects. At present only ten hours/week is required for industrial subjects. Some of us who have been in this work for a long time are not at all happy over this trend.” OMA file African Advance: M.J. Murphree, “Supplement to Historical Notes on the Founding of Old Umtali,” February 1951.

⁶¹ OMA file African Advance: M.J. Murphree to All Patrons & Friends of Hartzell Training School, 31 March 1951. There is no indication whether a final version of this handwritten draft ever circulated publicly.

difficulty involved with raising boarding fees at this time. However, he had no wish to see enrollment levels drop. In an environment of increasing food prices, students could not be fed on a budget consisting only of boarding fees and small government grants. Food grown with student labor would cover the difference, as it had for years through "general work" periods. Murphree seemed particularly confident of Old Umtali in this regard, describing it as "one of the best farms in Rhodesia."⁶² Despite professing the superiority of mission resources, Murphree tacitly acknowledged the centrality of unpaid student labor in mission education by seeking parental support for its continuation through "general work" requirements.

The quality and variety of food provided to boarding pupils also prompted several protests over the years. Edgington has suggested the repeated occurrence of such incidents indicates that despite the production of mission farms, food was "a serious, on-going grievance" of boarding students.⁶³ Student desire for more control over the products of their labor could sometimes collide with mission policy and result in isolated, individual actions. In many parts of Zimbabwe, people of all ages look forward to the boiling or roasting of green mealies around harvest time. It is a short-lived treat that lasts only until maize crops are dry enough for milling. But the maize from mission fields "was supposed to be for milling, not for roasting or boiling by the students."⁶⁴ Mission farm regulations denied this annual delicacy to

⁶² OMA file African Advance, M.J. Murphree to All Patrons & Friends of Hartzell Training School, 31 March 1951.

⁶³ Edgington 355. John Nhlwatiwa, a student at Old Mutare between 1947-1951, remembered student complaints about cowpeas containing weevils. Personal interview, 16 April 1998.

⁶⁴ M. N'ona, personal interview, 30 January 1998.

its student labor force, thereby appearing unwilling to accept even a slight reduction in their annual maize meal supply. Longtime mission residents remember pupil resistance to this restriction frequently taking the form of nighttime raids into the green fields to carry off maize cobs.⁶⁵ No missionary awareness of this activity appears in the annual Conference journal, unless possibly included under vague references to disciplinary issues. More broadly, that pupils had their own priorities concerning farming operations and the distribution of food seems to have escaped missionaries, who instead concluded “they do not understand our concept of economic enterprise. . . .”⁶⁶ The situation eventually prompted Tudor Roberts, the principal of Hartzell school, to call for a massive increase in production of composted manure, which he viewed as essential if “we are going to get serious yields from our unwilling, uninspired students.”⁶⁷

Although dismayed at the likelihood of the government syllabus turning towards less ‘general farming’ work, or even to theoretical agriculture, Tudor Roberts explained that even this would be better “than beating the land with dull *badzas* [hoes] and then having to think of excuses why our teaching is so poor.”⁶⁸ By 1954, a seemingly discouraged Roberts felt such curriculum changes had negatively affected even instructional agriculture, since classroom teaching could

⁶⁵ V. Maforo, personal interview, 11 March 1998.

⁶⁶ OMA file A24: Conference Agricultural Survey for Field Committee (August 1954) 14.

⁶⁷ OMA file African Advance: Report to Interpret the Specific Details of Non-recurring Askings for Executive Committee Consideration (7 October 1954) 2.

⁶⁸ OMA file African Advance. Report to Interpret the Specific Details of Non-recurring Askings for Executive Committee Consideration (7 October 1954) 2.

only maintain its effectiveness if the field results continually appeared prosperous. Lastly, he theorized that mission farms experienced declining productivity from their student labor force, in part because the average pupil age had gradually dropped as mission education became more acceptable and desirable. Only a year after the assignment of the “proper school farm” at Old Umtali, Tudor Roberts worried, “the decreasing size of the boys appears to make serious agriculture difficult. . . .”⁶⁹

The occasions when mission farms failed to attain even a relative self-sufficiency directly impacted the daily life of boarding students. Missionaries appreciated the potential volatility of these instances, particularly following a student strike at Old Umtali in 1942. According to Rev. George Roberts, drought had the mission “in a terrible plight for food for boys as there are no mealies in the country for sale. . . It is a terrible nuisance for almost everybody.”⁷⁰ After receiving smaller than normal portions one morning, students communicated their dissatisfaction to the boarding master. The situation remained unresolved at the midday meal. Steven Njambi remembered, “we did not eat the little that they gave us. For the next three days we did not eat, go to class, or work.”⁷¹ Government officials arrived from Umtali to assess the situation. After interviewing several

⁶⁹ OMA file African Advance. Report to Interpret the Specific Details of Non-recurring Askings for Executive Committee Consideration (7 October 1954) 1.

⁷⁰ UMCA file 1001-4-2:11: G.A. Roberts to Bishop J. Springer, 2 May 1942. Government sources predicted 1942 would be “remembered by native peoples as a *nzara* [hunger] year. . . failure of crops was not so complete even during *Mvemve*” [a year of famine about 10 years prior to white occupation when women were reduced to eating skin aprons and hundreds died]. GPSR: Report of Secretary for Native Affairs, CNC, and Director of Native Development (1942) 53.

⁷¹ S. Njambi, personal interview, 11 March 1998.

pupils, mission authorities were apparently issued a verbal warning to resume an acceptable level of rations. This decidedly rare student victory was dampened quickly by the subsequent expulsion of three alleged ringleaders from the mission.

Both pupils and teachers at AMEC schools must also have been aware of student protests at the mission facilities of other denominations. In 1947, Rev. H.I. James reported in Mrewa district, "conditions in the economic sphere have been especially difficult this year for both the people and for the mission's work."⁷² Widespread drought conditions resulted in some districts only realizing an estimated five percent of normal yields. In the hard hit Maranke and Zimunya districts, AMEC programs suffered on several fronts. Rev. M.E. Culver lamented the "crippling of our giving power, the absence of a large number of our male members who went seeking employment in order to buy food, the distress set upon almost every home, the reduction of increases from school plots to almost nil."⁷³ Given this general situation, it was likely no surprise when least three student strikes occurred that year in districts neighboring AMEC mission centers.

After a May strike at St. Paul's Catholic Mission in Musami (Mrewa district), 180 students left and were not readmitted. Mission officials had apparently decided that the pupils were to work an extra hour on Saturdays.⁷⁴ At the American Foreign Board mission in Mt. Silinda (Chipinga district), most older boys walked out "on account of a condition in the terms, previously accepted by them, that they

⁷² OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1947) 367.

⁷³ OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1947) 382.

⁷⁴ NAZ file S1563: NC Mrewa to CNC, Annual Report (1947).

do agricultural labour during the holidays.”⁷⁵ Although their walkout was conducted in an orderly fashion, none of the students were re-admitted to the school. Finally, a strike occurred at Rusitu Mission (Melsetter District) in the middle of the year over a “petty” matter. As neither side would give way, the boys’ school consequently closed down for the remainder of the year. Sixty-three students subsequently lost the tax exemption granted for those attending school. In this case, the state lent its authority to provide further sanctions against those who sought to alter the conditions of mission education. However, the NC Melsetter still admonished school officials, “if the missionaries would only act as a schoolmaster is entitled to do and enforce discipline by the administration of reasonable corporal punishment to their male students, it is considered strikes would be a thing of the past.”⁷⁶

This broad spate of resistance to continued labor requirements also intensified both government and missionary commentary on the products of mission school systems. One year earlier Rev. M.J. Murphree had to remind AMEC communities that “everyone is expected to do manual labor. It is unfair to teach and believe that all the manual work of the world should be done by certain people.”⁷⁷ The NC Umtali subsequently advocated official cooperation with missionaries to promote an outcome where “the young African with some education will not,

⁷⁵ NAZ file S1563: NC Chippinga to CNC, Annual Report (1947).

⁷⁶ NAZ file S1563: NC Melsetter to CNC, Annual Report (1947).

⁷⁷ OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1946) 247. While Murphree directed this towards a growing class of mission teachers and graduates, he was certainly aware of its relevance to the issue of race in colonial Zimbabwe.

perhaps, be such a misfit and begin to realize that education must not debar him from manual labor but rather that he has, by virtue of this education, more aptitude for all forms of work.”⁷⁸ Reactions of this sort reveal a growing anxiety in the years after the Second World War over the inability to control the broader outcomes of mission education. Both students and parents had aspirations for the use of education that often did not fit precisely with official expectations.

Rev. Wilfred Bourgaize had already observed this phenomenon at the smaller outstation schools in Mtoko district. By the mid-1930s, many older boys would attend only one or two months in the year before leaving home to find work. Consequently, they contributed little to the support of the local church and seldom paid the small school fee unless compelled to do so. Even while they attended classes, Bourgaize observed “a strong disinclination to take any part in the industrial program, the school garden or any other work in connection with the upkeep of the school.”⁷⁹ For such students, mission education programs certainly offered some skills useful to operating in a settler colonial economy. But it hardly seems surprising that pupils engaged in wage labor most of the year would not count gardening or “general work” among these. Mission school students formulated individual goals and consistently sought schooling on their own terms, thereby transforming mission educational outcomes in ways difficult to contain or reverse.

⁷⁸ NAZ file S1563: NC Umtali to CNC, Annual Report (1948). The following year, the CNC concluded that “the youth turned out by the schools today has little or no interest in local affairs and despises manual labor of any kind.” GPSR: Secretary for Native Affairs, Chief Native Commissioner, and Director of Native Agriculture, Annual Report (1949).

⁷⁹ OMA: The Methodist Episcopal Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1936) 44.

In some instances, educational aspirations could produce temporary results contrary to missionary ideals. Rishon Jangano remembered running out of money for his next school fees while in standard three at Nyadiri. After failing to raise the money locally by selling chickens, he found a job in Salisbury and worked until the next school year had already begun. However, unlike many who left for the cities, Jangano managed to return and finish standard four.⁸⁰ An only son, Isaac Makunike left Nyakatsapa to work various jobs in Salisbury and Bulawayo after family responsibilities had already forced him to abandon his education at standard two.⁸¹ By the mid-1940s, the flow of mission school graduates towards urban employment had intensified. Steven Njambi recalled “quite a few” standard six classmates at Old Umtali who moved on to careers in urban areas. Njambi himself worked first as a teacher in Chiendambuya and then as a dispatch clerk in Bulawayo. Kenneth Musuka and David Nhamaya became drivers while William Musuka worked as a builder.⁸² After Mupamiri N’ona finished as a boarding student at Nyadiri, he worked as a telephone attendant in Salisbury.⁸³ Timothy Makuwatsine began his schooling at Chidudu in 1952 and eventually completed standard five. When asked whether many of his schoolmates left for work in the city, he strongly affirmed, “that was our main objective after finishing school!”⁸⁴

⁸⁰ R. Jangano, personal interview, 23 April 1998. Although he could not provide exact dates, Jangano was probably at Nyadiri between 1925-1935.

⁸¹ I. Makunike, personal interview, 7 February 1998. He returned to Nyakatsapa from Bulawayo in 1939.

⁸² S. Njambi, personal interview, 11 March 1998.

⁸³ M. N’ona, personal interview, 30 January 1998.

⁸⁴ T. Makuwatsine, personal interview, 30 January 1998.

In 1939, Rev. George Roberts had predicted that mission-educated “boys with their animal husbandry courses and field work should be capable farmers when they return to their villages.”⁸⁵ But by 1959, the Conference Agricultural Committee had to acknowledge that students in academic programs had little time and a generally reduced interest in agriculture. Committee members recognized that more than a decade of increasing industrial and urban growth had presented new opportunities for many of their students. Yet the need to relate farming and stewardship to the ongoing programs of the church remained a priority of AMEC mission work. As an alternative, the Committee recommended initiating an on-the-farm training program, which they hoped would produce quicker results in “changing basic attitudes and the acceptance of better practices to bring about abundant life, than by the training of academic students who most likely will not return to farm life.”⁸⁶

These trends in mission education policy for agriculture continued on a wider scale, perhaps culminating in the government’s 1962 Education Commission report. The commission seriously questioned whether productive land husbandry practices could be instilled before pupils finished standard six or if rural communities could be significantly influenced by the schoolmaster’s garden. The report also expressed reservations about the failure of many missions in adapting their instruction to changing economic circumstances: “the argument for allowing

⁸⁵ OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1939) 318.

⁸⁶ OMA: The Methodist Church, Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1959) 382.

agricultural development prospects to strengthen and give meaning to the planning of education cannot, however, be translated, as some enthusiasts would wish, into the direct fabrication of human instruments who will speed the plough.⁸⁷ Interestingly, the Commission instead proposes an indirect route to better farming that anticipates current ideas about broader issues of ethnicity and identity: “the real instruments are the pen, the book, the newspaper and practice in the use of a universal language.”⁸⁸ While dismissing the formal education element of missions’ agricultural policy, the Commission did validate their long term attempt to instill certain farming practices as part of a particular community value system. Changing individual and public attitudes would continue to take more than simply instruction on farming methods, particularly if such teaching depended heavily on increasingly reluctant student labor.

Economic conditions in the reserves, coupled with changing labor markets, prompted student resistance to old missionary ideas about labor and education. The Commission then questioned the apparent continuation of a widespread missionary presumption that students “should be brought under regular control and supervision by hard and useful labor on the school grounds,” cautioning that “the anticipated excitement of high cultivation or stock breeding lies less in the digging of drainage channels than in their planning and their use in raising productivity.”⁸⁹ By this time,

⁸⁷ Southern Rhodesia, Report of the Southern Rhodesia Education Commission (Salisbury: Government Printer, 1962) 22.

⁸⁸ Southern Rhodesia, Report of the Southern Rhodesia Education Commission (Salisbury: Government Printer, 1962) 22.

⁸⁹ Southern Rhodesia, Report of the Southern Rhodesia Education Commission (Salisbury: Government Printer, 1962) 108.

seemingly few students who finished standard six intended to return immediately to agricultural pursuits. In a surprisingly candid analysis of a racially-based land tenure policy, the Commission sympathized with students who viewed agricultural training as a sentence to poverty and predicted this outlook would continue until agriculture in the reserves became prosperous. Recognizing the magnitude of transformation this would require, the Commission wondered “how clearly the nature of what has to be done is appreciated among the idealists who think in terms of a ‘joyful return to the land,’ linking their hopes with the belief that Africans will come forward readily to take agricultural diplomas if means are made available by the authorities.”⁹⁰ After years of government attempts to implement a broad program of agricultural improvement and social engineering, apparently few on the Commission saw this potential being fulfilled under the current land tenure system. The Commission thus accepted the eventuality of urban migration, especially amongst the educated in rural communities “who sought to enjoy the fruits of urban products and commerce.”⁹¹

Edgington has asserted that the education provided by mission farms reflected the needs of the mission churches and the colonial state more closely than those of the students. Yet just as converts had adapted and transformed the evangelical message of mission Christianity, both pupils and their parents utilized mission schools to suit their own needs. In 1940, the NC Makoni commented on the

⁹⁰ Southern Rhodesia, Report of the Southern Rhodesia Education Commission (Salisbury: Government Printer, 1962) 228.

⁹¹ Southern Rhodesia, Report of the Southern Rhodesia Education Commission (Salisbury: Government Printer, 1962) 24.

still expanding desire for education: “natives show anxiety to avail themselves of the benefits offered. . . so much is this the case that natives in the Chiduku and Makoni native reserves made bricks in the hope that the American mission would build school hostels.”⁹² Certainly, some denominations conformed more closely to settler expectations of African education as simply rudimentary training for a laboring class. For much of this period however, AMEC missions appear to offer a limited alternative. Numerous Conference records elicited the hope for creating a prosperous peasant base for the continued expansion of their churches. The American missionaries felt the agricultural instruction students received would promote the growth of such a base, thereby blunting the harmful effects of urban migration on families and especially churches.⁹³ Despite these oft-voiced sentiments, mission schools produced individuals whose motivations and goals were influenced but not controlled by their educational environment.

Clearly, the entirety of missionary educational endeavors depended most heavily upon the seemingly inexpensive price of student labor. But from the very first wage laborers recruited to become pupils, those who sought mission education had personal and family ambitions that drove their decision making. By the mid-1950s, several extended changes made the missionary vision of their students’ future decidedly less tenable. The difficulties facing farmers in the African reserves became more onerous under new government land use policies that sought to regulate most aspects of peasant agriculture and animal husbandry. Native Purchase

⁹² NAZ file S1563/1940: NC Makoni to CNC, Annual Report (1940) 294.

⁹³ Edgington 353.

Areas (NPA), land adjoining reserves that had been demarcated for individual tenure African farms, were fully occupied in many areas. Additionally, the government appeared unwilling to fulfill its promise of providing title for these farms. Secondary industry in Southern Rhodesia also underwent steady but significant expansion following the Second World War. The combination of newly compulsory farming methods, discriminatory government marketing policies, and further development of the urban wage economy made the return to farming, however 'progressive' in nature, an increasingly rare conclusion to years of mission education.

By the early 1960s, the political climate had changed as well. Widespread rural resistance to state intervention in African agriculture through the attempted implementation of the Native Land Husbandry Act did not fail to influence mission schools. Certainly, the close resemblance of many agricultural programs to the increasingly unpopular government requirements caused some to question missionary intentions. Subsequent outreach programs, such as the "butchershop in the backyard" initiative, promoted rural self-sufficiency and economic progress through intensive poultry and swine production. But by this time, a broadening political awareness dampened its reception in some circles. Ezekiel Makunike, a headmaster at Nyakatsapa in the late 1950s and then editor of the AMEC newspaper, described the perceptions of his colleagues: "we didn't like it because it was promoting separate development. It was to try and show that we could survive

despite the small lands, because most of the land had been given to the whites. . . we were not at a point to see anything that was good. The basic thing was our land.”⁹⁴

Whether intended as productive or demonstrational farms, for most of this period mission fields remained central to the student experience at AMEC schools. Mission finances necessitated a firm dependence upon student labor in order to approach some level of self-sufficiency. The basic school schedule that required a half day of labor from all boarding students sought to ensure continuous agricultural production through the category of “general work.” Missionary discourse tended to validate this practice in terms of its educational impact on pupils heading back to the reserves after standard six. However, only when faced with increasing student resistance did mission authorities begin to consider that their focus on making these farms produce did not provide the best environment for demonstrational instruction. Whereas missionaries promoted labor as an educational end in itself, pupils increasingly viewed agricultural work in terms similar to ordinary wage laborers. Agricultural classes may have provided training, but evidently not for the future envisioned by many students and parents. While maintaining a distinct identity as students, they had goals for farm production often at odds with mission school administrators. This eventually generated a broad, low-level challenge to school policies. Under certain conditions, such differences even resulted in spontaneous student protests.

Although AMEC missions frequently espoused the tenets of ‘progressive’ agriculture, growing enrollments forced center farms to attempt a more commercial form of production. In addition to the questionable demonstrational value of this

⁹⁴ E.C. Makunike, personal interview, 17 March 1998.

effort, mission farms become more like their European neighbors: dependent upon a continuous supply of cheap labor. But without significant production by student workers, missionaries concluded that school fees would necessarily increase. This could limit enrollments and potentially impact the longterm success of AMEC efforts at evangelization. Parents likely understood this transfer of productive labor from their household to the mission but recognized the potential investment returns. Pupils also realized that they labored towards the future, but their vision increasingly led towards ends at odds with missionary expectations.

CHAPTER 6

PROFIT FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE? MISSIONS AND FARM-BASED ENTREPRENEURS

The passion for wealth as such is a distinctive development. . .The taste for possessions can exist without money; the thirst for self-enrichment is the product of a definite social development, it is not natural, but historical.¹

This chapter traces the family histories of several more prominent AMEC farm-based entrepreneurs. While these examples are largely atypical, their successes or failures reveal how exposure to mission Christianity influenced economic choices made in the face of discriminatory government policies. Mission agricultural education and extension did not simply create the entrepreneurs who would respond successfully to these challenges. Business acumen and entrepreneurial spirit did not arrive in Zimbabwe with Rhodes' Pioneer Column of 1890.² However, mission communities could provide resources and contacts that undoubtedly shaped the activities of these farm-based entrepreneurs. The importance of mission education would reside not with instilling a Weberian 'spirit of capitalism,' but rather in providing certain skills or opportunities that could be used to overcome the particular difficulties imposed by a settler colonial economy.

¹ A. Giddens, Capitalism and Modern Social Theory: an Analysis of the Writings of Marx, Durkheim and Max Weber (London: Cambridge University Press, 1971) 214-15. Quoted from Marx, Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Okonomie (Berlin, 1953).

² For example, see H.H.K. Bhila, Trade and Politics in a Shona Kingdom: The Manyika and Their Neighbors, 1575-1902 (Essex: Longman, 1982) 252-56.

In his lengthy analysis of middle-class formation in colonial Zimbabwe, Michael West recognizes evidence from elsewhere in Africa of “the strong agrarian basis of entrepreneurial classes who later branched out into other sectors of the economy.”³ He then rightfully contends that realities specific to colonial Zimbabwe largely suppressed this process. The interests of mining and settler agriculture drove government policymaking, resulting in an economic system which “generally precluded the rise of a significant agrarian-based group of African capital accumulators.”⁴ Having arrived at this conclusion, West quickly turns his attention away from the countryside towards the cities. However, evidence does exist to illustrate how some rural individuals overcame numerous obstacles to become successful farm-based entrepreneurs. For example, by the mid-1960s, Native Purchase Area (NPA) farmers sold one-third of all marketed African production despite comprising only two percent of farming households.⁵

Inequalities in access to land and labor meant that a relatively small number of households in the reserves also sold the bulk of marketed surpluses. Despite these figures, without further elaboration of conditions in the purchase areas and reserves, West’s analysis only illuminates the urban economic/political developments in middle class formation. Similarly, Volker Wild’s recent history of entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe points to both the “initially improved. . .commercial

³ M.O. West, “African Middle Class Formation in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1890-1965,” dissertation, Harvard University, 1990, 257.

⁴ West 258.

⁵ W. Duggan, “Native Land Husbandry Act of 1951 and the Rural African Middle Class in Southern Rhodesia,” *African Affairs* 79 (1980) 235. Less than 9,000 farmers eventually procured access to NPA land.

prospects of the African cultivators" as well as the extended impact of state limits to the development of "a market-oriented, efficient African agriculture."⁶ But like West, he gives no further attention to rural entrepreneurs, apparently concluding that because "not one capitalist farm worthy of the name" emerged in the reserves, no entrepreneurial enterprises developed either. While West's definition of middle-class largely limits the scope of his analysis to urban areas, Wild's study is instead confined by his strict application of a particular model of capitalist behavior.

By keeping Africans in the reserves on the margins of an increasingly capitalized economy, colonial policies largely resulted in impoverishment and prevented the expansion of a rural middle class. But whatever the injustices that accompanied this process in Zimbabwe, it seems likely that specific settler agricultural interests only exacerbated an already difficult set of transformations under colonial rule. Under any circumstances, the transition towards a market-based cash economy results in substantial popular suffering and dissatisfaction. However, an unquestioning acceptance of the totality of state impact neglects the history of individuals who managed to overcome such obstacles. Government policies never had precisely the sort of influence anticipated by their architects since the agency of colonial subjects continually moved within, between, and against state structures. As such, the colonial rural economy did offer limited opportunity for some alongside privation for many. For instance, Cheater's study argues that NPA farmers belonged to the capitalist class, in spite of their relative under-capitalization. She also stresses that a variety of entrepreneurial forms eventually emerged from the pursuit of diversification beyond agriculture. Farm-based entrepreneurs owned

⁶Wild 14-16.

stores, eating houses, as well as cash income through contract ploughing and transportation of produce. This challenges the exclusively urban focus of other studies on Zimbabwe which seemingly begin with the premise that "the process of [rural] class formation has been so underdeveloped. . .as not to warrant serious investigation."⁷

During the first twenty years after settler occupation in 1890, immediate economic concerns had heavily influenced the pattern of land acquisition and official policies. Most early European settlers maintained visions of wealth based upon the exploitation of the colony's mineral wealth. An 1895 editorial stated, "the main reason we are all here is to make money and lose no time about it."⁸ This early European focus on mining allowed an economic expansion of the African peasantry through surplus agricultural sales.⁹ African producers enjoyed certain advantages over their white counterparts. Since the intensification of household labor did not require additional capital, African producers and traders could frequently undersell a more capital-intensive European agriculture¹⁰. These new colonial markets prompted many peasant farmers to expand production beyond previous levels. According to Edgington, one former mission student had become a

⁷ Cheater 176.

⁸ R. Palmer, "The Agricultural History of Rhodesia," 225.

⁹ D.N. Beach, "The Shona Economy: Branches of Production," The Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa, eds. R. Palmer and N. Parsons (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977) 37.

¹⁰ Ranger, African Voice, 111. See also G. Arrighi, "Labour Supplies in Historical Perspective: a Study of the Proletarianization of the African Peasantry in Rhodesia," Journal of Development Studies 6, 3 (1970) 197-234.

successful farm-based entrepreneur, managing over 100 head of cattle and producing 300 bags of maize during a single season. By 1929, he also owned three ploughs, two wagons and an automobile.¹¹

However, the expected “Second Rand” did not materialize. The focus of settlers turned towards commercial farming. During the 1920s European agriculture began to overtake and diminish the earlier success of African production. Government marketing and support began heavily favoring settler farming through discriminatory policies. Expanded production by white farmers caused grain prices to drop still further. Official concerns emerged over a rising entrepreneurial class in the reserves. One N/C worried that “some of the more pushful and advanced natives [were] grabbing large areas of land to the detriment of their fellows.”¹² Another goes even further, adding that “one effect of the work of the agricultural demonstrators is to imbue a few natives with the idea of money-making, whereas the goal should be the raising of the level of agriculture throughout the reserves. He sees a marked tendency for the demonstrators to become, in effect, the farm-managers of a few enterprising and money-seeking plot owners. . . .”¹³ This same group was also the most likely competition for settler-produced maize.

Responding to settler agriculture’s demands for protection in the early days of the Depression, the government introduced Maize Control Acts which “effectively ruined” African market farmers through the creation of discriminatory

¹¹ Edgington 371.

¹² Bessant 70.

¹³ GPSR: NC Goromonzi to CNC, Annual Report (1932) 5.

pricing and marketing mechanisms. The same legislation also took mission farms out of the maize market, preventing the sale of surplus supplies for cash. Mandated low prices also caused difficulties for mission officials seeking to supplement any shortfalls in their production for the boarding department. Price levels around Nyadiri Mission, for example, fell substantially in 1941 and caused local producers to withhold crops from the market.¹⁴ Furthermore, the Cattle Levy Acts imposed dipping fees on all cattle and combined with an extended outbreak of hoof-and-mouth disease to shatter the market for African sellers.¹⁵ By the early 1930s, the combination of government policies and depression made it onerous for many Christians to maintain their level of support for the mission facilities. The drop in grain prices meant that the volume of contributions for schools and churches had to double. This increased burden caused some adherents to leave the fold.¹⁶

All over the country increasing inability to meet the costs of living outside state demarcated areas forced many Africans into the reserves. The Land Apportionment Act (1930) had only intensified this process, often forcing those Africans still economically successful onto reserve land. Overpopulation and overstocking in the reserves quickly became a regular topic in administrative reports. Perceptions of soil deterioration and the faltering of African subsistence production generated wider governmental concerns. Satisfying continued settler demands for land could only occur if the reserves maintained their capability to

¹⁴ UMCA file 1001-3-5:25. T.A. O'Farrell to Bishop Springer, 15 August 1941. He also reports that "missionaries have been hard put to buy mealies at all this year."

¹⁵ Edgington 199-201.

¹⁶ Ranger, Peasant Consciousness, 89.

absorb an increasing African population. In 1932, the Chief Native Commissioner believed forthcoming state policies ought to “develop the native reserves so as to enable them to carry a larger population, and so avoid, as far as possible, the necessity for acquisition of more land for native occupation.”¹⁷

Despite the constraints of both mission education and state policies, some in the immediate mission community made significant accomplishments of social and economic mobility. Even the most repressive economic policy, meant to stifle African opportunity, inevitably created other opportunities in ways the state could neither predict nor control. Several AMEC individuals made notable transitions to farm-based entrepreneurs. Patrick Mutsaindi began selling vegetables in town while still a student at Old Umtali between 1926-1928. By the mid-1940s, his marketing business had expanded to include a lorry and eating house. Another former Old Umtali pupil, Solomon Mrabwa, ran a profitable business shipping vegetables from Inyazura to Salisbury by train. Johnson Pferadzai, who gardened for Rev. Roberts while a student at Mutambara, began with market gardening and eventually became a storekeeper.¹⁸ Such cases of economic success amongst former mission students usually appear in the context of evidence for the importance of school and church. But these influences alone cannot stimulate or facilitate entrepreneurial activity. These individuals still remained relatively rare, even amongst the mission educated. A mission education was at most a necessary, but never a sufficient factor in making the transition to farm-based entrepreneur. Roberts also noted the example of One

¹⁷ Palmer, Land and Racial Domination, 202.

¹⁸ UMCA George Roberts Papers: personal notebook (1946) 3.

Musiwa. He never advanced beyond standard two at Old Umtali, but found a lucrative niche market supplying eggs to a hotel in town. In 1945, he grossed over £140.

Abraham Chadamoyo Kawadza never attended a mission school. Missionary sources estimated his age at over one hundred years when he died in March, 1960. So it was not a particularly young man who had questioned Rev. George Roberts about using a plough in 1908 (see Chapter 2). Kawadza had begun his entrepreneurial activities years earlier, following in his father's footsteps as a hunter. His father, Muperagotsi, hunted elephants with enough skill to earn the name Kawadza (from the verb *kuwadza* - to chop or cut with an axe). Abraham began hunting *hware* (quail) to sell for cash. Eventually, this money became part of his initial capital, along with earnings from marketing a limited amount of maize in Mutare. After buying his John Deere ploughshare, Kawadza began to grow winter wheat to supplement his expanded maize fields. The marketing of maize in Mutare and green mealies at nearby Penhalonga enabled him to purchase his own transport, with larger-capacity wagons gradually replacing scotchcarts. He employed as many as three drivers who handled the transport business under the supervision of his younger brother Joshua.

By the mid-1920s, Abraham was also employed as a farm manager for a settler named Edward Stokes. The extra cash from this job allowed Kawadza to buy cattle in Buhera and sell them for a profit in the Umtali area. His employment with Stokes also led to another position as manager of the irrigation project connecting Old Umtali Mission with surrounding European farms. Abraham recognized an

opportunity and sold numerous cattle to the irrigation project for feeding work crews. His ownership of both horses and mules by this time indicate a level of prosperity few rural Africans ever achieved in colonial Zimbabwe. Perhaps most remarkable, however, Abraham Kawadza purchased the Stokes farm. Stokes apparently kept Kawadza's hunting and maize marketing earnings for a number of years, eventually suggesting further installments and a land transfer instead of cash payment.

Kawadza began the installments in 1932-33 and had taken over the farm by 1935. The Kawadza family still remembers a prophetic suggestion by Stokes: "if I could give you this money, it won't work for you very much. . .what is better for you is to have land because in the future you are going to be forced from Manyarara and Chikuya because it is going to be Europeans there."¹⁹ That Kawadza could gain title to a large farm against the impending uncertainty of land apportionment marks him as an exceptional individual. Even those African farmers who later bought farms in the Purchase Areas experienced great difficulty in obtaining outright title. But Stokes had predicted correctly. Abraham's other lands, the fields where he began successful, extensive, plough-based agriculture, became part of a designated European area in 1940.

It took Kawadza some time to entirely transfer his activities to Buffalo Bush Farm. His cattle herds remained divided between the new farm and Chikuya. In 1937, he sent his eldest son, Zekias, to live on the farm near the Mandisekwe and Zhonga fields. The existing house on the farm stood far from these main fields so

¹⁹ A. Kawadza and C. Kawadza, personal interview, 4 April 1998.

Zekias and his wife lived in a pole/dagga house until 1940 when they moved into a newly-constructed house. Meanwhile, Abraham gradually transferred his property from Chikuya in Mutasa district. By 1942, with the movement of property completed, Kawadza became a full-time resident at his farm. By this time, his cattle herds reportedly numbered over 500 head. Kawadza apparently also purchased the existing farm store on this property, owned by a European trader nick-named *Kuzvida*. The store then became a family enterprise. Poor management soon saw the family deep in arrears with the general dealers who supplied their goods. Paying off these financial obligations drew “almost all the wealth Kawadza saved. . . .”²⁰

When Abraham Kawadza finally transferred all his efforts to Buffalo Bush Farm, the scale of his farming operations had long grown beyond the scope of household labor supplies. His livestock holdings remained large enough that he graciously waited to drive his cattle to the local diptank every month, not wishing neighbors to be delayed while his herd completed the treatment. The farm employed more than ten workers year-round. Abraham’s wife, Magaline, managed a large household, including the daily food preparations both for her large family and this sizable workforce. At peak labor periods, Kawadza utilized his connections with numerous local churches to supplement his labor supply. Organized parties of church members aided with cultivation, reaping and threshing. Kawadza usually slaughtered a cow for them to eat that day, as well as paying some cash wages. This was not a *nhimbe* or *gumwe* but rather an informal practice dependent upon Kawadza’s status in both the Christian community and the cash economy. Although

²⁰ C. Kawadza, “Abraham Kawadza’s History,” unpublished manuscript (1998) 16.

built upon church connections, this system blurred the line between wage labor and older forms of reciprocity. Neighbors struggling to obtain foodstuffs in the pre-harvest months also worked for rations on Kawadza's farm. According to some of his descendants, neighbors "could finish their own crops and when they were starving, they could come work for Kawadza. . .the land was so big that he could not finish. . . ."²¹

Charles Mamombe Makunike joined the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1914 and was later involved in the founding of Nyakatsapa Mission. Makunike and Abraham Kawadza, related through marriage, became strong friends. Kawadza also influenced the younger Makunike's approach to technology, resulting in the spread of ploughs to the Nyakatsapa area. Makunike eventually purchased two 16-span wagons that he used for marketing local produce (maize, sorghum, and beans). Nyakatsapa tenants depended on these wagons for their crops to reach market. At this time, Makunike purchased directly from the producers, selling their crop at Penhalonga mine and in Umtali. In the 1920s, he purchased his first grinding mill. He also began growing wheat, using household and hired labor to construct a brick oven that would supply the mission community with bread.

By the end of the decade, Makunike became chairman of a new local organization known as the Better Farming Association.²² This association "of like-minded people" had a largely Methodist membership, but other Christian denominations were also represented. Therefore, it extended outside the mission

²¹ A. Kawadza and C. Kawadza, personal interview, 4 April 1998.

²² E.C. Makunike, personal interview, 17 March 1998.

tenant community to encompass individuals from the surrounding reserves. Makunike himself had a number of additional fields outside the mission. Members worked closely with Agricultural Department demonstrators, in some instances also becoming close friends with these government officials. The Makunike mission fields became a center of agricultural demonstration in the area, drawing in visitors from the reserves for numerous field days. But this activity remained outside the sphere of significant missionary influence and resulted from the personal contacts Makunike made with local agriculture officials. His mission fields quickly earned the local nickname *gorokoshō* (agriculture).

The Better Farming Association made a cooperative business venture in the late 1930s, also purchasing a reserve store. That this enterprise failed in part due to poor management exposes the sort of difficulties involved with a transition from successful farmer to farm-based entrepreneur. According to Ezekiel Makunike, "there was no management. They had managed farms and farming had been responsible for making them able to buy this, but a store is a different kind of animal."²³ However, he may overstate this point. A cooperative venture demands management skills beyond those required in a more conventional or family operation. This store failure may also illustrate that even overlapping church and association ties could break down under new business demands.

By the mid-1930s, Makunike's cattle herd had reportedly grown to over one hundred. However, his transport business had nearly collapsed by the early 1940s following the implementation of government destocking policy in the area. In this

²³ E.C. Makunike, personal interview, 17 March 1998.

case, the mediating buffer that mission status usually offered towards official policy on African agriculture failed to materialize. This situation was in stark contrast to the evident lack of authority agricultural demonstrators could exert within the mission, where they "only came because of personal friendship. They weren't mandatory. They didn't have power. . .they were coming on our terms to give us what we wanted."²⁴ Despite destocking being a government policy, mission officials broke the bad news to their tenants. Makunike's herd was eventually reduced from over one hundred to only four. The "excess" head were bought up very cheaply by white entrepreneurs from Umtali. Around Gandanzara, informants recall prices as low as £1/10 per head at a time when they might normally have sold for £9.²⁵

This unpleasant reality of artificially low prices led some reserve farmers to begin selling their weaker specimens, forestalling complete destruction of their herd but further reinforcing negative official attitudes towards African animal husbandry methods. Some agricultural officers apparently had difficulties recognizing this strategy as one of resistance and self-preservation. The LDO Umtali District tried to explain the mixed results of an initial sale held in 1945 at Zimunya Reserve, "owing to some misunderstanding, the natives thought that the beasts were a voluntary gift to War Funds, and brought very old and inferior beasts. Prices were low and many were rejected by the buyer. However it is hoped that this first sale will have opened the eyes of the natives to the need for livestock care and improvement."²⁶ Certainly

²⁴ E.C. Makunike, personal interview, 17 March 1998.

²⁵ A. and C. Kawadza, personal interview, 4 April 1998. They referred to this as no more than "the price of a goat."

²⁶ NAZ file S 2989/DU/100/1/50: LDO Umtali to NC Umtali, May 1945.

these sales opened eyes, but more likely to the decreasing viability of any peasant option in the reserves where property rights had finally vanished like security of tenure.

So the wagons that Charles Makunike operated from Nyakatsapa lay idle, much to the detriment of the surrounding farmers: "The people whose livelihood depended on that transport suffered immediate death as it were. You no longer had a vehicle to transport your maize to town and it affected the whole farming structure."²⁷ Only Makunike's recognized talent for training oxen teams prevented the complete disintegration of his transport business. He forged symbiotic relationships with friends and neighbors, gaining access to the power of their livestock in exchange for returning a docile, hardworking team. But such arrangements remained inconsistent, frustrating any long-term plans for expansion. The family's fortunes recovered somewhat further in 1947, when an uncle's truck purchase enabled a partial resurgence through market garden production to supply Umtali. By this point, artificial constraints placed on land and livestock meant that for most households the opportunities for profit in agriculture lay not with surplus cereals production but instead with more remunerative vegetable and fruit crops. But a mission report from 1954 indicates that a cooperative system of transport and

²⁷ E.C. Makunike, personal interview, 17 March 1998. Also see OMA boxfile Agriculture (Miscellaneous): M.J. Murphree to Cattle Inspector (Umtali), 20 April 1942. This mission report assessed Charles Makunike's herd at twenty-nine head. Of the sixty households listed, only three possessed more than twenty cattle. Eight tenants owned ten to twenty head each. Twelve households owned less than five head each.

selling no longer existed at Nyakatsapa. Instead individuals carried their produce by bicycle to Umtali, a hilly twenty-five miles away.²⁸

John Nhlwatiwa's parents already belonged to the AMEC when he was born near Gandanzara in 1932. As another contemporary of Abraham Kawadza, his father had been another early convert to the *gospel of the plough*. He then undertook extensive maize production for sale in Rusape, as well as rice cultivation in a soggy nearby vlei. By the late 1930s, he also possessed a cultivator, harrow, scotchcart, and wagon. His wagon provided transport to market for the produce of many neighbors and extended family members. The elder Nhlwatiwa's production was extensive enough to necessitate the engagement of paid non-household labor, although apart from peak periods, this usually occurred only on a casual, piecework basis.

Prior to government destocking programs beginning in earnest during the 1940s, he owned over fifty head of cattle. John Nhlwatiwa remembered his father attempting to shield the household from the full impact of destocking by converting some of the herd to dairy production: "He started dairy because that was a way to avoid destocking. He was the only one who had about twenty cattle. Others had about three or four. He was allowed to have more because he was supplying the people with milk. . . My father was a headman so that helped him also."²⁹ While this position as a salaried local representative of state authority could be useful in mediating the effects of a discriminatory livestock policy, it did not provide

²⁸ OMA file A24: Conference Agricultural Survey for Field Committee (August 1954) 3.

²⁹ J. Nhlwatiwa, personal interview, 16 April 1998.

complete immunity. Likewise, although headmen usually had some input when programs such as centralization began attempts to 'rationalize' residential patterns in the reserves, their status often only buffered the subsequent results.

Government agricultural demonstrators usually performed these new demarcations and attempted to enforce sanctioned cultivation methods, gradually generating increasing hostility towards wider state attempts to transform African agricultural practices. Popular unwillingness to accept these increased restrictions could also place headmen in a delicate position as they normally assisted demonstrators with designation and allocation. But even as a local headman, Nhlwatiwa's father had to accept some reduction in his overall acreage, as well as an end to his supplemental vlei crops. One of the explicit goals of official soil conservation policy was to eliminate all African cultivation near stream banks or in the swampy vlei areas. Under the new regulations introduced with the 1941 Natural Resources Act, continued rice production became largely illegal outside government irrigation projects.

The issue of vlei cultivation eventually exposed some tensions between government departments when an article in the NRB periodical *Murairi* made several advisory recommendations for Africans growing rice in the sponges or vleis. One DNA official subsequently lamented, "we have an apparent difference between the department and the board which the native is going to love. . .although pursuance of the article published in *Murairi* might not result in drainage [of vleis etc.] if the instructions are skillfully and faithfully obeyed, there is nothing in the

past to encourage a belief that natives will obey those instructions.”³⁰ Since official staff presence remained sparse and infrequent in many reserves, instances of non-compliance soon became commonplace. In 1953, DNA Director R.M. Davies wrote to his provincial agriculturalists, warning “it is also noticeable that natives are extending their cultivations outside the originally demarcated lands, especially above and below the contours, on stream banks, grass strips, vleis and even into stream beds.”³¹ By utilizing their mission connections, however, certain individuals managed to develop economic alternatives to this constrained future of farming in the reserves.

Lazarus Mawoyo’s father arrived as a young boy at Old Umtali in 1911. There he completed standard two and met his future wife who had fled an arranged marriage in Portuguese East Africa (Mozambique).³² Both became full members of the Church and they married in 1928 after he had received supplemental training in electrical work from Rev. Marshall Murphree. This training led to an extended career at AMEC missions as he helped to expand the electrical system at Old Umtali, Nyadiri, and Mrewa centers. The elder Mawoyo also farmed successfully on lands at Old Umtali, even winning prizes in several mission agricultural competitions and eventually receiving a government master farmer certificate.

In the early 1960s, prior to his retirement, Mawoyo negotiated with mission officials for an alternative to the regular monetary pension they initially offered. In

³⁰ NAZ file S160/MC102/4/50: PNC Umtali (L.V. Jowett) to CNC, 19 December 1949.

³¹ NAZ file S2985/LAN/1: Director of Native Agriculture (R.M. Davies) to Provincial Agriculturalists, 16 February 1953.

³² L. Mawoyo, personal interview, 2 April 1998.

lieu of regular payments, he secured continued access to arable land within the mission property. For the next twenty years he farmed approximately six acres, growing maize, potatoes, and vegetables. While not much larger than the average reserve holding, this arrangement held other benefits for the Mawoyo household, such as superior soil fertility, access to transport, and proximity to education/healthcare facilities. Although he owned no cattle, and thus faced the common reserve problem of insufficient draft power, Mawoyo overcame this through the annual hiring of mission equipment. In place of cattle and a single-harrow plough, a tractor and disc-plough prepared his six acres. He later took further advantage of this location, opening a general dealership that served the mission community and neighboring commercial farm workers. These land rights were never formalized through title, but son Lazarus still lived there in 1998, more than a decade after his death. These arrangements clearly reflected Mawoyo's personal and family goals, as well as the interests of cash-conscious mission officials.

Faced with limited access to arable land, shortages of draft power and manure, and increased transportation difficulties, others in the mission communities eventually focused more intently on growing marketable produce. This 'market gardening' could take many forms. In some instances, the mission station itself had evolved rather quickly into a market for particular foodstuffs. At Old Umtali, the wives of hired laborers used their temporary access to mission land for vegetable production, supplying the needs of the missionaries, teachers and medical staff. A regular market emerged within the workers' housing area which eventually drew

customers from outside the mission station. Lazarus Mawoyo remembered women arriving by bus from Sakubva township in the 1950s and purchasing produce for resale in urban markets.³³ Old Umtali's location on the main road from Inyanga also enabled some of its residents to take advantage of regular transport for the sale of further surpluses to markets in Umtali. Even those individuals or households without the labor to produce marketable vegetable crops could obtain cash through planting *mbambaira* (a type of sweet potato). As a hardy tuber crop, it required far less attention to weeding, watering or pest control. Surpluses were carried by bus into town for sale to various markets.

The tenants at Arnoldine Mission could not access markets as easily from their location over twenty kilometers off the road from Headlands to Umtali. While the surrounding European commercial farms provided occasional income for those willing to work as farm laborers outside the mission, the resident population of these farms does not appear to have constituted a regular market for tenant produce. However, new opportunities emerged with the opening and subsequent expansion of nearby Inyati mine in the decade following the Second World War. The mine compound created a year-round demand for fruit and vegetable crops that Arnoldine tenants could supply with relatively little competition. Somewhat isolated in the middle of a designated European area, mission residents were well-positioned to access the mineworker market, given the distance and transport difficulties that faced more distant reserve farmers. By the end of the 1950s, individual produce

³³ L. Mawoyo, personal interview, 2 April 1998.

retailers from within the mineworker community were arriving regularly at Arnoldine to purchase their stock.³⁴

Specific Methodist doctrine could influence crop selection, and thereby, an important part of the farm-based entrepreneurial process. In the years after the Second World War, the Rhodesian tobacco industry underwent substantial expansion. While the bulk of this growth occurred in the European sector, some African farmers positioned themselves to participate in the boom. Unlike their British Wesleyan counterparts, Methodist Episcopal communities forbade the use of tobacco. For these Methodist farmers, the provision against tobacco extended from their home to their fields. But records show certain church members around Gandanzara grew tobacco during the 1959 season, drawing the attention of the local minister as well as district mission authorities. While the pastor convinced some to discontinue the practice, others apparently continued, "still thinking it is a good thing to grow tobacco for the money it brings in."³⁵ Although both his parents were long time converts, Rev. Maxwell Chambara remembered his father growing some Turkish tobacco in the years after his mother died in 1954. This sun-cured variety only became part of the rotation in the absence of a very devout wife. But by the early 1960s, many church members' economic goals would challenge this element of the existing AMEC farming ethic. Today, even descendants of Abraham Kawadza plant some tobacco on the land where he once threatened to personally destroy it.

³⁴ S. Fusiri, personal interview, 31 March 1998.

³⁵ OMA: The Methodist Church, Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1959) 401.

Indeed, had mission communities simply adopted certain aspects of AMEC Christianity, the doctrine might have squelched more entrepreneurial efforts than it spawned. While the colonial economy did not provide very favorable conditions for African tobacco production, AMEC missionaries opposed its cultivation on moral grounds rather than any economic or environmental impact. Coupled with their stance on the extensive vagaries of regional wage labor structures, this indicates how the idealized missionary vision of rural society could itself constrain access to already limited opportunities for expanded incomes. Even the AMEC model of intensive smallholder farming required annual inputs which only those households with additional cash might afford. Beinart, Cheater, and others have shown that supplemental extra-farm incomes, even if achieved with the social costs of migrant labor, were often crucial to successful peasant agricultural production in Southern Africa.³⁶ As evidenced in the nature of their own attempts at commercial farming operations, AMEC missionaries also discouraged increased farm capitalization by means of formal or informal loans. This attitude became part of a broader AMEC ideology of individual responsibility that influenced even larger farm-based entrepreneurs such as Abraham Kawadza. His descendants recalled, “he thought helping out was all right when one was in trouble, but not so that one could go out and start a business. If you want to do that, you must work and plan for it.”³⁷

The varying geography of AMEC mission communities offered differing prospects for farm-based entrepreneurial activities. In comparison to the average

³⁶ W. Beinart, The Political Economy of Pondoland, 1860-1930 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Cheater 113-14.

³⁷ A. Kawadza and C. Kawadza, personal interview, 4 April 1998.

reserve location, some provided heightened opportunity for transport and access to the nearest agricultural markets. Whether through cooperative ventures, private arrangements, or public transport services, most of these missions offered producers the chance for cash incomes. Larger stations, with their resident teaching and hospital staffs, could even become markets in themselves. Farm-based entrepreneurs emerged as larger producers attempted to diversify, most often into services requiring some initial capital investment in equipment or technology (e.g. crop transport, contract ploughing, maize grinding, or even storekeeping).

Most AMEC missionaries regarded their own efforts as the driving force behind these economic changes. Indeed, their model of a rural Christian society placed significant emphasis upon material progress, in this case, through the intensification of African agriculture. Success at farming for the market would then lead some into other related business ventures. But it seems clear that for those few who managed to make this transition, mission influence remained but one of the variables influencing their decisions. Pre-existing socioeconomic differentiation, related employment experiences, and individual entrepreneurial inclinations all shaped economic outcomes despite exposure to particular AMEC ideas about farm management or crop selection.

In most cases, the influence of Christianity on economic behavior remained largely non-denominational. A wide variety of practicing Christians eventually rejected what Cheater has termed the ‘traditional idiom’ of accumulation. She describes one struggling Purchase Area farmer, concluding his rejection of the traditional idiom of accumulation arose “mainly from his identity as a practising

Christian, but also from the greater prestige of the modern idiom in Msengezi.”³⁸ Certainly, mission Christianity played a role in shaping this new way of life by lending its spiritual backing to the often difficult transformation of popular agricultural techniques and responsibilities. AMEC missionaries were amongst the most vocal on this relationship. However, that no single denomination appears to have held a monopoly over farming or entrepreneurial initiatives emphasizes the need for closer examination of individual experience and ability. The limited emergence of farm-based entrepreneurs, despite the circumstances faced by rural communities in colonial Zimbabwe, supports Wild’s suggestion that often “it is not capital that makes the capitalist, but the capitalist that makes the capital.”³⁹

Personal motivation and timing contributed significantly to successful farming. In the reserves around Abraham Kawadza’s homestead, “they wanted to plant when it had rained. But for him, pre-planting was very important. It would rain when he had already finished planting. Plus, he had a machine for planting maize. . . .”⁴⁰ In other accounts, this access to new technology retained paramount importance. In the reserves around Nyakatsapa, “they did have demonstrators so they tried their best, except they did not have the implements. . . at the mission, what you saw more was this *gorokoshō* [proper agriculture] because my father had implements to do more things.”⁴¹

³⁸ Cheater 114.

³⁹ Wild 48.

⁴⁰ A. Kawadza and C. Kawadza, personal interview, 4 April 1998.

⁴¹ E.C. Makunike, personal interview, 17 March 1998.

Not surprisingly, the early entrepreneurs still remembered today are almost uniformly men. Both government and mission land policies increasingly restricted women's ability to move beyond successful household producers. Land tenure patterns on the mission farms resembled that of the reserves, in that women could only effectively gain individual rights to land upon becoming a widow. The capital needed for diversification normally remained with the male family head. Missionary discourse on the 'proper' Christian household reinforced these gender roles, portraying African women as necessarily preoccupied with domestic life and protected from a public sphere unsuitable for their inherent abilities. Consequently, many women turned to market gardening, as sale of surpluses produced within the accepted range of normal domestic responsibilities could provide an income under their personal control. Such income did not likely go towards purchasing the public markers of agricultural prosperity such as scotchkarts, wagons, or cultivators.

Beginning in the 1930s, these supplements to crop farming income would gain new importance as discriminatory land and marketing policies severely impacted many established entrepreneurial ventures. In some cases, individuals made use of their position in mission communities to shield themselves from the effects of unpopular conservation and destocking programs. AMEC agricultural education and extension programs attempted to provide skills which would enable individuals to farm intensively and successfully under conditions prevalent in most African reserves. But because the direction of mission farm policies closely paralleled government efforts, communities still remained vulnerable to the resultant economic ramifications. By 1960, increasingly unpopular limitations on land

holding and animal husbandry practices reached the point where even those who had earlier succeeded within the AMEC model seriously questioned the continued validity of mission farm policies.

CHAPTER 7

LET ME TELL YOU A STORY: ABRAHAM KAWADZA AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF HISTORICAL NARRATIVES

He was the first man who was clever enough to realize he could sell some green maize at the mine in Penhalonga. . .Even to build the good houses, you had to come and copy from Kawadza. To buy ploughshares, they had to come and copy from Kawadza. . .Even those who bought cars, they had to copy from Kawadza. . .Chief Gandanzara used to walk on foot whenever he wanted to meet anyone. But because of seeing Kawadza riding a horse, he himself decided to ride on a horse. . .We can say in Manicaland, or we can say in Zimbabwe, most of the good things were started with Kawadza.¹

Histories of Africa produced during the colonial period generally begin with the premise that indigenous societies existed in a timeless, static condition. The sort of broad changes that formed the very basis of history had seemingly never occurred within Africa. Therefore, history in Africa began with early European contacts. Colonial accounts proceeded to chronicle the variety of European activities in Africa. Even more than most Europeans in the colonies, missionaries viewed themselves as direct agents of change and, therefore, creators of history. Their personal accounts, usually written for public consumption back home, inevitably include both struggles and successes inherent to mission work. More specifically, in their accounts of agricultural change amongst African societies, missionaries frequently attempted to script for themselves the central role as protagonists driving

¹ A. Kawadza and C. Kawadza, personal interview, 4 April 1998.

a story of progress and civilization. In order to highlight the problematic nature of missionary accounts and their influence upon other interpretations, this chapter examines a variety of historical sources relating to Abraham Kawadza (also see Chapters 2 & 6). His life experiences support a self-peasantization approach to rural history which challenges any mission-centric interpretation of agrarian change in colonial Zimbabwe.

In Colin Bundy's discussion of relations between the Mfengu and Methodist missionaries in nineteenth century Transkei, he points to one of the key issues facing historians who must confront mission sources. Methodist accounts of their early missionary efforts in the Cape Colony frequently revolved around demonstrating linkages between the missionary presence and subsequent transformations amongst local communities. Missionary authors sought to document a variety of 'firsts' amongst the African populations exposed to Wesleyan mission Christianity. Subsequent church histories maintained "the first plough that turned up soil north of the Kei was guided by the hands of a British Wesleyan missionary. . .the first cotton grown in South Africa. . .the first waggon [sic]. . .the first European type of house. . .the first tilled lands and garden" were all attributed to an extended missionary influence.² Most historians had accepted these sources at face value. Bundy, however, suggests a more complex scenario wherein the missionary factor remains only one of several crucial variables that shaped the growth of an African peasantry. The knowledge and outlook central to the expansion of peasant agriculture also moved within or among African communities

² C. Bundy, The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979) 35-36.

through pre-existing social relations. Experiences in the employ of European landowners exposed some individuals to the ideas and skills so often claimed as a monopoly in mission sources.

John and Jean Comaroff encounter similar themes in examining London Missionary Society (LMS) accounts of mission influence amongst the southern Tswana. LMS evangelists hoped to reconstruct Tswana life primarily through the introduction of a plough-based agricultural system. Wherever ploughs eventually appeared in the region, missionary sources sought credit for their spread. In 1887, LMS missionary John Mackenzie wrote, “Under the supervision of the missionaries, the natives learned a higher agriculture, and exchanged the hoe of their own ruder garden work for the plough and spade. What had been done at Kuruman was imitated by the natives elsewhere.”³ As did Bundy, the Comaroffs challenge any uncritical acceptance of this missionary narrative. They contend that the Tswana adapted rather than adopted new agricultural methods and technology. The doctrine of rational farming, much like that of mission Christianity itself, “was never passively received.”⁴

For the AMEC missionaries in colonial Zimbabwe, their history of ‘firsts’ largely revolves one man, Abraham Kawadza. A variety of mission sources recount a common story of how in 1908, persistent missionary encouragement eventually overcame Kawadza’s initial reluctance to accept plough-based agriculture. In these accounts, Kawadza becomes a conduit for both the evangelical and practical

³ Comaroff and Comaroff, Of Revelation and Revolution, vol. 2, 141.

⁴ Comaroff and Comaroff, Of Revelation and Revolution, vol. 2, 153.

messages of mission Christianity. He reforms his polygynous household, sending the youngest three of his four wives home to their parents. Kawadza then becomes a full member of the church and even builds a chapel on a site near his home. His crop yields that first season indicate the magnitude of this transformation, the extended fields producing “about eighteen times more food than he had ever had before.”⁵

However, the first mention of Kawadza in written sources appears years earlier. Before his death in 1924, Jason Machiwanyika produced his History of the Manyika, one of the earliest attempts to record local social history in the vernacular (translated to English in 1943).⁶ It covers an extended range of subjects, many of which Machiwanyika divided into lessons. In this text, Abraham Kawadza is also central to the coming of the plough. Kawadza is described as both a “good Christian” and “a pioneer in using European ploughs.” He becomes very wealthy, eventually purchasing a wagon and a scotchcart. To conclude this lesson, Machiwanyika wrote of Kawadza, “He was the first African in Manyikaland to plough with European ploughs. . . After him the Christians became many in Manyikaland. Many Africans imitated Abraham Kawadza in church affairs as well as using European ploughs. He was a pioneer both for the church and for the fields.”⁷ Machiwanyika’s history remains important, in part because it illustrates

⁵ G.A.Roberts, Let Me Tell You A Story (Bulawayo: Rhodesia Christian Press, 1964) 19.

⁶ NAZ file MA14/1/2: J. Machiwanyika, History of the Manyika People, c.1924 (trans. w. musewe, 1943) lesson 10.

⁷ NAZ file MA14/1/2: J. Machiwanyika, History of the Manyika People, c.1924 (trans. 1943), lesson 10.

the early presence of the clear association between agricultural practice and exemplary Christianity. That this sequence of events was recorded in such a complete fashion by the early 1920s indicates both the increasing importance of plough-based agriculture and how rapidly the experiences of Abraham Kawadza entered the historical consciousness of people in surrounding areas.

The main force behind the entrenchment of this basic narrative within AMEC sources was Rev. George Roberts, widely acknowledged as the missionary who converted Kawadza with the gospel of the plough. He served as an AMEC missionary from 1907 until retirement in 1950. Closely similar versions of his account appear in various formats over four decades. Roberts' recollection in his 1946 district superintendent's report (excerpted in Chapter 2) reads nearly identical to both an earlier (1935) and later (1964) account:

‘If I get a plough, will the mealies grow the same for me as they do in your field?’ I assured him that they would. ‘If I get a plough, will the rains come upon my field as it does on yours?’ There was the fear that without the sacrifice of beer to the rainmaker there would be no rain. ‘If I get a plough, will it be alright with the white people?’ He was assured that the white people would be glad to get more food for the boys working on the Penhalonga mine.⁸

It seems Kawadza presented a promising case for conversion purposes. The three wives who appear later in Roberts' account of the ‘plough conversion’ indicate a level of material prosperity that is only further supported by his eventual purchase of the plough which required a team of sixteen oxen. It seems unlikely that AMEC missionaries failed to recognize the evangelistic value of converting influential

⁸ OMA: The Methodist Church, Official Journal of the Rhodesia Annual Conference (Old Umtali: Rhodesia Mission Press, 1946) 227-28.

individuals. That Kawadza possessed the level of wealth prior to obtaining a plough certainly leads to the questioning of Roberts' essentially "rags-to-riches" version. Family sources clearly indicate that Abraham Kawadza had already engaged in entrepreneurial activities prior to conversion. Although he began with hunting, Abraham was eventually selling maize in nearby Umtali even before adopting plough cultivation. This part of the family tradition does not appear in any missionary sources. Perhaps Roberts first spoke about a plough with Kawadza because of his local prominence as the son of a well-known hunter. Yet Roberts might have identified Kawadza and spoke with him about ploughing precisely because Abraham had already marketed surpluses and entered the cash economy.

Similarly, mission sources provide no details concerning Kawadza's family background prior to 1908, save for the polygamous nature of his household. This perhaps reveals Roberts' desire to portray his agricultural efforts as crucial aspect of the conversion process, thereby transforming both spirit and flesh. So Abraham Kawadza appears as a transitional figure, shifting from local religion to Christianity, from hunter to sedentary farmer. But rather than recognize the complexity of this process, missionary accounts ignore his socio-economic background and essentially collapse his life into a few brief conversion encounters, effectively making Kawadza a blank slate upon which mission Christianity creates the modern man.

Perhaps the most powerful example of this process is found within Roberts' Let Me Tell You a Story and centers on Kawadza's purchase of the Stokes farm. By securing outright title for this land, Abraham provided his family with a level of long-term security and autonomy normally unattainable for Africans in a settler-

dominated society. Although Roberts' account does mention this achievement, it is only in passing. To anyone unfamiliar with the dynamics of land apportionment in colonial Zimbabwe, it would hardly seem that remarkable: "Not long after he started using the plough, he was comparatively rich and was able to buy his own farm."⁹ Once again, the missionary accounts collapse events to portray a rapid and dramatic transformation. If this occurred shortly after 1908, it would likely emerge in Machiwanyika's History of the Manyika. Given the rest of his description there, an accomplishment of this nature should appear alongside Kawadza's other notable deeds. However, it does not. Moreover, by all family accounts, Kawadza only began making installment payments to Stokes in the early 1930s. He completed the transaction in 1935, nearly thirty years after he ploughed his first field.

By collapsing his narrative, Roberts' account magnifies missionary impact. The benefit of the plough becomes more immediate and substantial. The path presented towards progress and rural prosperity is therefore deceptively simple: the use of a new technology guided by a new spiritual force. Wherever this innovation failed to transform household incomes or produced environmental degradation, the problem became a failure to follow the ideals of Christian stewardship. Farming methods outside the accepted rotation model were evidence of a practical and spiritual 'backsliding'. Implicit in this discourse was the idea that missionaries not

⁹ Roberts 20.

only introduced important benefits, but had to remain present in order to ensure continued results.¹⁰

Other evidence also exists of Roberts' desire to assure his role in the recounting of an agricultural transformation amongst Africans in colonial Zimbabwe. In 1951, E.D. Alvord, the Director of Native Agriculture, retired from the position he had held for nearly twenty-five years. Himself a former missionary for the American Foreign Board, Alvord had been a driving force behind government efforts to change African farming methods through demonstration and eventually compulsion. These two men had known each other since Alvord's arrival at Mt. Silinda mission in 1919. Only in 1951 does a certain tension between them emerge through a number of letters to newspaper editors and relatives. Early that year, the Umtali Post carried a piece on Roberts' that outlined his forty-two years of service in the colony. The appearance of a shortened version of this article in a government-sponsored weekly, The Harvester, drew a lengthy response from the outgoing Director. The article had suggested that Roberts' had probably been the first missionary agriculturalist, having arrived in the colony several years prior to Alvord. The reporter went on to state, "Mr. Roberts is the man who introduced ridging and terracing for soil conservation and irrigation into the country."¹¹

After seeing this article in a paper which had previously featured his regular commentary, Alvord responded in the next several issues of The Harvester. While

¹⁰ This outlook was seriously challenged by the early 1960s during the tenure of Bishop Ralph E. Dodge. His desire to quicken the development of an indigenous AMEC administrative hierarchy alienated some long-serving missionaries.

¹¹ "Missionary Looks back on 42 Years of African Agriculture," Harvester, 7 March 1951: 1.

not challenging Roberts' earlier appointment as an agricultural missionary, Alvord countered, "the fact is that he was early on diverted from that work into full-time executive and administrative mission work. . .as superintendent of various mission stations. . .and can hardly claim to have been engaged all this time as an agricultural missionary. I have been employed continuously and full-time by mission and by government as an agriculturalist."¹² He went on to point out that while pupils at Mutambara were growing vegetables quite early, the accepted practice of assigning individual plots was initiated at Mount Silinda. Furthermore, Alvord contended that he had actually advised Roberts to construct the first ridges and terraces for lucerne fields at Mutambara. But Roberts would continue to maintain the centrality of his role, writing again in 1964, "I consider that starting those contour ridges at Mutambara is one of the most valuable gifts I have given the people of Rhodesia."¹³

Alvord's retirement had also prompted an article outlining his long career which eventually appeared in Reader's Digest.¹⁴ The article depicted government policies at the forefront of progressive agriculture and placed Alvord at the helm of an important and potentially influential program. Roberts' correspondence reveals his reaction to what he perceived as a rewriting of history. He claimed that the article had simply restated Alvord's own words, "and we know him to be the

¹² E.D. Alvord, letter, Harvester, 4 April 1951: 2.

¹³ Roberts 37.

¹⁴ L. Pope and C.W. Hall, "Man Who Founded a People: Mt. Silinda Mission, Rhodesia," Reader's Digest 58 (March 1951) 51-55.

greatest advertiser of his own work that Rhodesia has ever had. The article is almost all misstatement from beginning to end, exaggerated beyond any facts.”¹⁵

While acknowledging the broader influence of Alvord’s programs, Roberts’ attributes this to a much larger budget and the backing of colonial officialdom. He doubted, however, that the educational impact was any greater despite these advantages.

Several months later, the Reader’s Digest article apparently still offended Roberts’ sense of history, as he again wrote home to relatives about Alvord. After accusing him of rank exaggeration, Roberts did some historical imagining of his own, stating that “we had a hundred teachers out doing the best teaching of agriculture before Alvord arrived in the country.” He then reaffirms his own perception of the region’s recent agricultural history, concluding, “I believe no other people have made more progress in the last forty-four years than these have and I have had a hand in all of it.”¹⁶ Clearly, both these men sought to claim the main responsibility for changes on a scale beyond the scope of one individual. Although the government implemented Alvord’s policies across the country, other factors influenced their acceptance or rejection by local farmers. Agricultural knowledge also passed through family connections, church networks, and employment experiences. Official sources must receive the same healthy skepticism as mission documents, since both tend to view change as the product of their individual efforts.

¹⁵ UMCA George Roberts Papers: G.A. Roberts to Cora and Harry Roberts, 25 August 1951.

¹⁶ UMCA George Roberts Papers: G.A. Roberts to Cora and Harry Roberts, 3 December 1951.

Even with its' relatively limited circulation, Roberts' last published account from 1964 has influenced subsequent written histories and the construction of Abraham Kawadza as an historical figure. During one of our interview sessions, Charles Kawadza showed me a well-worn copy of Let Me Tell You a Story. Upon later comparison with his written family history, Roberts' influence appeared significant:

Abraham did not think this would work with the African people as it was a white man's custom of ploughing. He asked Mr. Roberts if the rains would rain if he used a plough. And he asked again if the white mans' community would be happy to see an African using a plough like the whiteman themselves. Mr. Roberts told Kawadza rains would rain as usual and that the whites would be happy because there was a scarcity of food at the mine in Penhalonga and in Mutare.¹⁷

The possession of written historical accounts within a particular community is likely to shape the content of any core group version, reinforcing or privileging elements of individual remembrances that coincide with an increasingly standard narrative. Furthermore, church-sponsored histories have usually relied upon official sources and archives which include such written accounts. In 1996, the United Methodist Church (formerly the AMEC) commissioned a brief history to honor the centennial of activities in Zimbabwe. In its coverage of Abraham Kawadza's career, Let Me Tell You a Story is the only source cited. The similarities are again obvious:

One African, Mr. Abraham Kawadza showed some interest but he feared that if he used the plough rain might not fall on his fields. Kawadza also wanted to know whether white people would allow him to buy a plough. Roberts assured Kawadza that rain would

¹⁷ Kawadza 8.

continue to fall on his fields and that white people would be happy to sell a plough to him. Thank God Kawadza bought the plough and became the first African in the whole country to do so.¹⁸

In accepting the key elements of Roberts' account, and thereby validating its central claim of a necessary and transformative missionary influence, the Church today is able to claim his successes as their own.

Still, there are major discrepancies between the missionary and family accounts. According to family accounts, Kawadza had already been a Christian for some time when Roberts approached him. The family's early acceptance of Christianity is today remembered as a legacy of Abraham's father, Muperagotsi, and the dreams of his deathbed. Prior to his passing in about 1895, he disclosed to his wife what he felt to be a dream of some portent. He dreamt of a gathering that had one person speaking in front, with men on one side and women on the other. He told his wife, "I have dreamt of white people meeting and talking. . .they were talking so peacefully. . .those people had no knees."¹⁹ Muperagotsi expressed a wish that if such a thing came into being, his family should join the movement. So the family history recalls that Abraham, his wife, mother, and siblings became some of the earliest converts to the evangelistic efforts of American Methodist missionaries in 1901 or 1902. At this point, Abraham divorced two of his wives and remained with one. He stopped brewing beer and "all other activities which were not Christian."²⁰

¹⁸ Nhlwatiwa 108-9.

¹⁹ A. Kawadza and C. Kawadza personal interview, 4 April 1998.

²⁰ Kawadza 7.

This account differs from the mission “official” history in that Kawadza’s conversion to Christianity and his plough purchase apparently occur years apart.²¹ Roberts may have attempted to persuade Abraham to buy a plough even prior to his conversion. But Kawadza remained reluctant and expressed some anxiety over the potential outcomes: “he thought he would miss his friends in the process of cultivating fields and brewing beer and inviting people when they dug the fields with hoes. . . if he bought a plough, he would be doing it all alone and leaving the rest of the people.”²² It is interesting to note that while Roberts’ written account of concerns with rainmaking or European farmers emphasizes issues of fear and power, this oral family account focuses on the social impact of new technology in community relations.

Family and church member accounts usually point to Abraham’s newfound Christian faith as the element which allowed him to overcome personal doubts. Social relations might be stressed, but adoption of the plough entailed some significant spiritual risks as well. Much of the early resistance to ploughs revolved around the idea that any implement which cut the land so deeply would offend ancestral spirits. The existing tillage system of *chibhakera* had utilized only hoes, mechanically restricting the depth and scale of cultivation within ritually-sanctioned limits. The sheer force produced by ox-drawn iron ploughshares thus directly challenged the continued viability of this method. Initial skepticism therefore

²¹ A. Kawadza and C. Kawadza personal interview, 4 April 1998.

²² A. Kawadza and C. Kawadza personal interview, 4 April 1998.

centered on the consequences of this potential affront to the spiritual forces that *chibhakera* and its attendant rituals had usually managed to placate.

Early converts to mission Christianity, constantly encouraged to abandon the ways of their ancestors, became more likely to disregard such prohibitions and experiment with new technology. For some United Methodist congregations in Zimbabwe today, Kawadza's acceptance of the plough in such circumstances symbolizes the depth of his conversion to Christianity. Accordingly, initial suspicion and fear of the plough began to fade "because we had one person who said 'it is a myth, let it come.' What Abraham Kawadza did is what we were hoping for many Christians, to stand up and say, 'that will not happen. I will do it this way.' So Abraham took advantage of his faith in Christ. . . ."²³ Such accounts cast mission Christianity as a liberating influence, a new worldview that allowed individuals to transcend the practical and economic constraints of local religious beliefs.

Other remembrances of Kawadza clearly show him as an individual who also overcame many of the barriers constructed by a government increasingly responsive to white settler interests. Several accounts reference his ownership of horses and guns, both comparatively rare amongst the African population of colonial Zimbabwe. Horses were quite expensive and guns generally prohibited outside white hands. Recollections on this topic emerge in both family and church member accounts. Each positions Kawadza as a unique individual able to move effectively across the social and economic divisions within colonial society. Since

²³ M. Chambara, personal interview, 24 February 1998.

he gained horses, guns, and a large farm subsequent to hearing the gospel of the plough, Abraham's successful appropriation of the central symbols of settler dominance also tends to validate the primary role of mission Christianity in creating transformative social change.

Several specific examples merit closer examination. On one of his journeys to purchase cattle for resale, Kawadza found himself requesting shelter overnight at a village near Buhera.²⁴ The residents of the homestead invited him inside but warned that he would find his horse killed by lions in the morning. So Abraham decided to guard his horse during the night. They then warned him that both horse and owner would be dead in the morning. Since the sun had already set as Abraham looked for a place to rest himself and the horse, he switched on his torch for light. His hosts had never seen such a device and thought Abraham possessed a source of fire. They stopped preparing their fire from dry tinder, quickly took some grass, and asked Kawadza to share his fire. Later that night a lion tried to attack his horse and he shot it dead. In the morning he showed the dead lion to his hosts and continued on his trip. In this account, the power exhibited in killing a lion, along with Abraham's clear mastery of several new technologies, are juxtaposed to the frightened, unaware simplicity of his hosts.

Remarkably, Kawadza had official permission to travel openly with his gun in Manicaland. He also assisted officials with a number of court cases in Umtali. But a white policeman once arrested Abraham around Mutasa for carrying a weapon

²⁴ Kawadza 11-12.

and took him to the police station. The senior officer reprimanded the young policeman and informed him that Kawadza had permission from the district commissioner and the BSAP commander to carry his gun. The young policeman apologized and returned the gun to Abraham, not fully realizing the affront he had caused. He then jokingly said, “Why do you carry a gun? An old man like you, do you think you can shoot anything?”²⁵ Abraham then asked the young man to stand clear from his fellow officers, pulled the gun over his back and aimed at the young policeman. The young policeman threw himself to the floor under a desk. The room filled with laughter. A different policeman had to drive Kawadza back to where he had been collected. In this instance, Abraham becomes a figure not only influential with local chiefs, but also of some importance to colonial officials. Incidents involving police, firearms, and Africans rarely ended as joking matters in colonial Zimbabwe. This story demonstrates Kawadza’s personal stature in the region, indicating an extensive personal network that included peasants and chiefs, as well as missionaries and government officials.

Abraham was widely known for tithing regularly and auspiciously, annually giving the church many bags of maize, plus cattle or sheep. Shortly after becoming a Christian, Kawadza had built a chapel at his home in Mutasa. He led prayers there nightly. On Sundays, the chapel held morning and evening services for his family, workers, and neighbors. When Abraham moved to his new farm near Gandanzara in 1935, he constructed another chapel simultaneously with his new house. He frequently provided local churches with transport services. Kawadza provided the

²⁵ Kawadza 13-14.

wagons, oxen and drivers that moved building materials from Nyakatsapa to erect a church retreat at Nyatande. He also donated all the bricks used to build a church at Chikurewo, transporting them to the site with his own labor and equipment. Here, the gospel of the plough had come full circle. Kawadza's activities in supporting local churches, exemplifying the values of Christian service and charity, had become possible only through his prior spiritual and agricultural transformation.

Yet the reality of Kawadza's longterm success does not precisely fit the ideal AMEC model of intensive peasant farming. With his extensive holding at Buffalo Bush farm, Abraham Kawadza did not practice the ubiquitous crop rotation recommended by mission agriculturalists and government demonstrators. No contour ridging appeared on the farm until after his death in 1960. Holding title for the farm meant his cattle herds escaped reduction under the government destocking policies that affected most reserve farmers. While he did plant sunhemp and clover to plough under as green manure, his large herds meant there was no shortage of manure. That he succeeded this way in positioning himself to overcome the policies of an intrusive settler government is not only testament to individual entrepreneurial spirit, but also calls into question missionary enthusiasm for a prosperous future built on small-scale agriculture under the constraints of minority rule.²⁶ At various points in time, continuing reductions in reserve household acreages would render even the most progressive farmer unable to maintain an economic operation. As

²⁶ For example, see A.P. Hunt, Manicaland Irrigation Schemes: an Economic Investigation (Salisbury: Dept. of Native Economics and Marketing, 1958) 6. This report notes that the inequality of land distribution on certain projects mirrored that in the reserves. Greater household incomes on larger holdings were not due to better farming practices or increased yields per acre. Rather, Hunt contended "both small and larger plots support roughly the same size labor force and production is insufficiently intensive on the smaller to compensate for their fewer acres."

this period went on, the impact of severely limited African landholding on most household incomes could not be overcome solely through intensive farming methods, eventually resulting in a widespread rejection of mission and government agricultural programs.

Perhaps more problematic for a mission-centric interpretation of rural social change in colonial Zimbabwe, it seems clear that Kawadza's personal experiences in the employ of white farmers also formed a major influence on his agricultural direction. His tenure as manager for Lincoln Stokes, coupled with his work for the Old Umtali Irrigation Board (a cooperative venture between the mission and surrounding white farms), provided new insights towards agriculture as a commercial venture.²⁷ Family relations also proved important, as Charles Makunike first encountered the plough and other new ideas because of his kinship with Abraham Kawadza. Makunike then introduced these methods around Nyakatsapa mission. Ezekiel Makunike remembered Kawadza and neighboring white farmers having more influence on his father than the missionaries stationed there. He dismissed a direct relationship between conversion to Christianity and any subsequent entrepreneurial mindset, observing,

Kawadza became successful not because of the church. He had already become successful. He had his many wives...Kawadza had lots of these farmers around apart from missionaries. With Kawadza and my father, one foot was with the church and the other with the white commercial farmers. My father was a good friend of neighboring farmers. So he really got all this input from off [the mission]. . .²⁸

²⁷ It is important to observe, however, that such employment experiences could contradict the bulk of mission and state advice on the benefits of small farm production. As Carol Summers points out, men who worked for European farmers quite possibly "could not learn intensive agriculture from Europeans because Europeans did not practice it." Summers 273.

²⁸ E.C. Makunike, personal interview, 17 March 1998.

Such testimony casts doubt upon missionary claims of directing the process of agricultural transformation and the creation of rural entrepreneurs. It now seems more likely that missions were only one of several conduits to ideas and information during this period. The influence of mission Christianity did not create the ‘economic African’ imbued with an entirely new spirit of entrepreneurial capitalism. However, mission communities could provide access to skills or resources essential in navigating the complex colonial landscape.

Ranger’s important work on Makoni district has shown how various forms of mission Christianity provided important elements of a wider peasant consciousness. He explains that the process of self-peasantization involved adopting new strategies of labor utilization, crop selection and “subsequently in technology and ideology.”²⁹ Most importantly, peasants in Makoni “took ideological initiatives that paralleled their productive responses.”³⁰ Following from their forthright emphasis on agriculture, AMEC churches logically became the preferred domain of a rising new social group, the rural entrepreneurs. Similarly, small-scale producers around Chiduku adopted the Anglican faith. This analysis correctly recognizes both pre-conversion peasant production and the agency of Africans in creating their own forms of Christianity. However, Ranger’s explanation seems to locate religious conversion within a broader individualistic rationale, largely neglecting other significant factors in accounting for the apparent close association between mission activity and agricultural innovation.

²⁹ Ranger, Peasant Consciousness, 31.

³⁰ Ranger, Peasant Consciousness, 43.

Missionary societies often engaged in direct competition for access to potential converts and therefore sought to establish clearly defined areas of influence. Colonial government regulations determined the minimum distance between the churches and schools of different denominations. So the initial exposure and conversion to Christianity for many rural folk depended more upon their mundane physical location than any comparative evaluation of theology or doctrine. Furthermore, to suggest that Makoni peasants selected from a variety of denominations on the basis of economic criteria denies any element of spirituality in the conversion process. Did the larger peasant farmers really choose American Methodism simply because they realized its ideological emphasis upon successful progressive farming provided a certain congruency with their productive goals? Or did conversion occur for other reasons and consequent exposure to such an ideology actually create the alternative worldviews that shaped or facilitated the expansion of entrepreneurial activity? Certainly, most early AMEC missionaries believed that this was indeed the case. Of the first church members at Gandanzara, it appeared by 1923 that those "who own plows are no longer poverty-stricken. They are the foundation of progress in the village whenever a forward move is to be made."³¹

Neither explanation adequately addresses the fact that people from a wide variety of Christian backgrounds adapted new agricultural technology. Ranger acknowledges that opportunities to undertake the peasant option depended heavily upon access to markets. Where this essential economic determinant coincided with a AMEC presence, expanded agricultural production became another bit of positive

³¹ Ranger, Peasant Consciousness, 43.

reinforcement for their missionary activities. Remove markets from the equation, however, and the varied intensity of denominational emphases on agricultural improvement matters far less. Without sufficient economic incentives, the gospel of the plough would make few inroads amongst rural Christian folk. Since access to agricultural markets seldom determined the initial distribution of mission stations, the subsequent ability of surrounding communities to exercise the peasant option varied considerably. Therefore, both the spiritual and practical choices facing rural Zimbabweans in the early 20th century depended substantially upon elements beyond their immediate control. This is not to argue for adoption rather than adaptation when people made such decisions, but rather to say that individual agency must always confront wider structural forces. Some of these obstacles give way under pressure while others remain unmoved and instead channel individual actions along a particular path.

Finally, most missionary groups operating in early colonial Zimbabwe incorporated some element of agriculture within their broader evangelical and educational programs. Early stations established by the Anglicans, Trappists, Jesuits, Wesleyan Methodists, London Missionary Society, and American Foreign Board were located on large farms donated through BSAC government channels.³² While the depth of commitment to 'progressive agriculture' varied amongst these denominations, a basic imperative of mission work, the creation of a stable Christian community, necessitated certain changes in farming practices. Mission facilities depended heavily upon the local community to finance or otherwise support their

³² Zvobgo 66-71.

construction, maintenance, and ongoing costs. Wherever markets or transport might have made it possible, missionaries would certainly have encouraged converts to participate in the expanding cash economy through production of agricultural surpluses. Whether they were of European or North American origin, missionary conceptions of peasantization involved a general system of ordered, permanent, monocrop plough agriculture.

To argue that the mission doctrine of a particular denomination either produced or attracted rural entrepreneurs overlooks other crucial factors. That the converts around the Trappists' Triashill mission could only engage in the "mixed subsistence-production and labor migration economy" which Ranger describes has more to do with an isolated, inaccessible location than any lack of Catholic prohibitions against established agricultural rituals involving sacrifices and the consumption of alcohol.³³ Indeed, there were many influences on the process of self-peasantization aside from religious identity. Therefore, rural folk Catholicism should not be understood as a limiting factor or merely the preference of those choosing not to engage in market production. Likewise, the obvious prominence of agriculture within AMEC discourse cannot be used to conclude that a demonstrably higher proportion of rural entrepreneurs emerged from their mission communities. To simply accept these missionary claims risks presenting religious identity as the single overriding influence upon agricultural change in colonial Zimbabwe. While mission Christianity might provide guidance and encouragement, the ecological and

³³ Ranger, Peasant Consciousness, 44.

geographical constraints faced by rural communities ultimately determined the reality of their peasant options.

Abraham Kawadza, as remembered in all the above mentioned sources, has attained legendary status and today exemplifies nearly all the values and goals of United Methodist mission Christianity. He is not seen as the first convert, *per se*, but rather the first to combine Christianity with a plough-based agricultural system. Despite his lack of formal mission education, he combined the AMEC values of agricultural innovation, economic success, and sober piety. While still held up as a model Christian individual, his achievements have become the basis of legend within the United Methodist Church (UMC) community in Zimbabwe today precisely because many of them were so atypical for the colonial period. Kawadza's story is also presented as an example of how the provision of new farming skills transformed people's lives. For United Methodist adherents, recent church-sponsored accounts seek to demonstrate "the initial and essential role the church played in revolutionizing farming methods among the African people. The church liberated the Africans from superstitions and fear and ushered them into the use of appropriate technology."³⁴

While he was certainly not the only African or Christian involved with this process of agricultural change, the standard version recollected by UMC members today seldom includes other individuals. Thus, a broad and complex process of social transformation has crystallized around this single mission convert. For Zimbabwean United Methodist congregations, Abraham Kawadza is becoming the

³⁴ Nhiwatiwa 109.

original Christian farmer: an individual who successfully negotiated the difficult terrain of spiritual and material transformation in a settler-dominated society. This is perhaps a result of the continuous presence of written accounts since the 1920s. It seems clear that these written histories can influence oral traditions. The case of Abraham Kawadza underlines the care scholars must utilize with both oral and written sources. Only a full consideration of family relationships, employment experiences, geographic realities, and individual decisions within the colonial environment will ensure an emphasis remains on understanding agricultural change as self-peasantization rather than a mission-centered process.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION: MISSIONS, AGRICULTURE AND THE WAY OF LOOKING AT DAYS¹

According to most accounts, the mission farms never achieved overall economic success. The general under-capitalization of mission farming operations led to mixed long term performance in both demonstrational and productive performance. In many ways, they resembled other European-owned farms in colonial Zimbabwe. Perennially short of funds and frequently under-staffed, AMEC farms became dependent upon students as laborers. At times, pupils' educational experiences appeared to revolve more around labor than training. Education on these farms could therefore reflect the needs of the missions themselves rather than the needs of their students.

Tension inevitably arose between educational and production goals for the farms. The mission records document this process through frequent counter-images of missionary success and failure in their extension efforts. African farmers adopted plough technology, but appeared to invariably plough against the contour. African farmers accepted the benefits of manure, but seemingly failed to apply it properly or efficiently. These swirling currents of self-congratulation and disappointment in most mission agricultural reports mirror a reality of mixed performance for mission farming endeavors. Mission farms remained a precarious operation, "even when it

¹ According to Ambuya Mberi of Chiendambuya, "During our time, we had only one sacred day a month. . .It was the missionaries who brought the way of looking at days." Hove and Trojanow 106.

is taken into account that the economic objective was not commercial profit but self-sufficiency to fund African evangelism. . . .”²

Yet the farms served another purpose as missions engaged in a struggle for contested physical and ideological space. Since the AMEC purchased or received farms already alienated and demarcated for European occupation, missions lands regularly came under scrutiny from former African residents. Relations with local indigenous authority structures could also suffer under the circumstances of missionary occupation of large tracts previously under chiefly control. Mission land use also attracted additional government attention as land deemed suitable for European settlement grew more scarce. Mission officials thereby sought to legitimate their continued presence on these large farms through various strategies for efficient and sustainable land use.

More importantly, AMEC missions exposed surrounding communities to a new way of looking at their world. Missionaries hoped to impose a new spiritual landscape, one in which religious messages reinforcing God’s primary authority over nature eventually mirrored ongoing state attempts to centralize control of various natural resource management processes. In colonial Zimbabwe, their spiritual and material imperatives coalesced around agriculture. Mission ‘agricultural evangelism’ consciously sought to challenge and invalidate existing ritual authority through the alteration of more practical activities. Religious conversion and economic change would occur simultaneously in a symbiotic process that produced the modern Christian farmer.

² Edgington 343: 353.

Since AMEC missionaries recognized the close relationship between religion and farming in Shona societies, their model provided an alternative to elements of local religion considered unacceptable for converts. The introduction and privileging of specific technical knowledge stimulated missionary hopes for the simple elimination of polygamy, alcohol, and magic from rural Christian life. Not only did converts have a Christian responsibility to farm according to the mission's stewardship model, but doing so would actually remove them even further from such problematic habits. For these missionaries, improved agriculture was therefore about much more than the issues of basic economic self-sufficiency for mission communities. Broader concerns over individual morality and rationality remained deeply embedded in the mission model of agricultural progress. AMEC missionaries themselves believed 'rational' farming practices would promote moral Christian behavior, while moral Christian stewardship would promote rational natural resource use.

In many ways then, mission agricultural education and extension policies emanated from the activist missionary imperative to engineer a particular type of African society. Mission sources normally depict an essentially top-down history of agrarian change in an attempt to legitimate their efforts in this direction. The evidence presented in this study, however, reveals that the realities of rural social transformation were much more complex. Despite careful missionary attempts to manage the outcomes, individuals with their own agendas absorbed and transformed these policies. In constructing their new identity, converts adapted elements of Church doctrine to retain their connections within local society, but also

appropriated specific elements of an individualized agricultural system. Local farmers utilized imported agricultural knowledge for their own purposes and did not conform to the experiences or expectations of American-trained agricultural missionaries. Other powerful influences such as social background and employment experience also helped to shape the economic decisions made by AMEC farmers. Within these mission communities, converts successfully blended new forms of worship with existing social priorities and also adapted aspects of imported farming techniques to actively create innovative strategies for negotiating life under settler rule.

Therefore, adherence to mission Christianity did not inexorably produce a class of rural entrepreneurs, but it certainly helped to prepare converts for understanding and managing the demands of the colonial world. The religious identity constructed by missionaries and converts involved substantive material elements. For converts, social status increasingly meant obtaining the outward symbols of an idealized rural Christian household and this required cash incomes. Mission Christianity did help foster the creation of new needs, and must therefore figure in any consideration of economic behavior. It seems likely, however, that the centrality of these material elements in both the domestic and agricultural realms of AMEC identity drove practical entrepreneurial activity more than any Protestant ethic or newfound inner spirit of profit-for-profits-sake.

AMEC missionary ideas of progress in peasant agriculture revolved around ploughs, manure, and a specified crop rotation. The earliest concerns with simply boosting production levels gradually turned towards raising yields as communities

around most missions began to face increasing government constraints upon their land use. Only an intensive, high-yield farming system could continue to sustain a level of rural prosperity sufficient to support mission churches and schools. AMEC missionaries therefore sought to make rural life both viable and more attractive. The stability that improved agriculture seemingly ensured would protect existing mission operations and encourage an expansion in membership. Fewer converts would leave in search of employment, thus avoiding the dangerous influences of city and compound. Successful farmer entrepreneurs would provide examples of the real world benefits to a spiritual transformation. Missionary visions of progress and success naturally emerged from life experiences, resulting in their presentation of agricultural improvement strategies based on an essentially American practical model.

The introduction of the plough would eventually result in significant changes to the agricultural practices of many African farmers. The Comaroffs have portrayed these new methods as a central element of increasingly sharp class divisions in rural society. Amongst missionaries and government officials in colonial Zimbabwe, the spread of plough-based farming systems also became associated with rural social differentiation. Few individuals, however, managed to transform themselves with technical knowledge alone. This is not to say mission agricultural efforts produced no individual success stories, but Abraham Kawadza likewise does not represent the average AMEC farmer. The point is not to diminish the achievements of exceptional individuals, but rather to move towards understanding how they

successfully manipulated a colonial system which placed so many obstacles in their path.

New equipment and expertise seldom amounted to more than an important, but insufficient, ingredient for class development. Sales of surplus grain and produce undoubtedly provided extra income for numerous families in mission communities. Abraham Kawadza, Charles Makunike and other AMEC converts did create successful entrepreneurial ventures using capital originally derived from extended plough production. Yet none of these individuals based their long term economic strategy around continual increases of production and yield levels. Instead they attempted to diversify, entering into the processing, transport and marketing of agricultural commodities.³ Intensified by depression conditions, discriminatory government marketing policies and cattle ownership restrictions for Africans claimed many rural enterprises by the end of the 1930s.

From this time on, many state agricultural officials consistently perceived an ecological disaster on the near horizon. The agricultural practices of African reserve farmers seemingly threatened the basic structure of rural colonial society. Although the problem emerged from the politics of land in a settler colony, conservationist currents in official thinking tended to dominate the government response. As a result, the state responded with a successive series of broad-ranging land tenure and natural resource use policies. These official attempts at reordering

³ Edgington 218. He also encountered similar individuals. An informant from Nyadire told of his classmate from the 1930s who developed a market gardening business in nearby Mutoko, diversified into other businesses, and eventually acquired a number of buses.

the countryside produced a variety of circumstances in and around mission communities.

As state intervention grew, mission farms received more scrutiny from both officials and their neighbors. Missionaries feared that any extended lag in conservation measures or farm performance might result in a loss of territory. Therefore, farming and conservation issues take on a new urgency in missionary discourse from the end of the 1930s. While mission farms remained outside the actual authority of government agricultural demonstrators, in many instances, mission policy instituted similar programs. Despite this, the varied application of state policy sometimes highlighted the separation of missions and their tenants from wider rural society. Centralization, contour ridging, and other compulsory measures were voluntary for mission tenants until long after their introduction in the reserves. Mission leases would eventually include such terms, but missionary intervention in tenant production methods remained sporadic. However, while the missions could mediate between their tenants and government officials, this provided no guarantee of escaping the broader trend towards state control over rural farming and grazing practices.

Although AMEC communities remained somewhat buffered from state intervention, in accepting most of the official logic inherent to the 'modernizing' of African agriculture, missionaries gradually placed themselves in a more tenuous relationship with their African congregants and the broader communities they served. By attempting to ingrain the ideas and techniques of small-scale intensive agriculture within an environment which often required extensive methods to meet

sufficient production levels, missionaries risked appearing supportive of continued racialized land tenure patterns. By the 1950s, popular resistance to expanding state intervention in agriculture inevitably overflowed to affect converts' experiences with mission education and extension operations. A second generation of Christians increasingly deemed farm-based programs designed to cope with the realities of minority rule as part of the problem, not part of the solution. Over time, the physical constraints of a segregated land apportionment system, and eventually wider transformations in the colonial economy, made any education geared for a return to the reserves less legitimate in many students' eyes. The missionary desire for creating a particular form of rural Christian society eventually collided with African aspirations for an education that might enable graduates to contend with these structural forces instead of avoiding them.

Mission farming programs had attempted to provide the sort of skills believed necessary to undergird a prosperous agricultural Christian community. Mission agricultural models sought to transform the household through a redefinition of gender roles. Men would become proper farmers and women become proper wives. AMEC mission doctrine emphasized building the value of agrarian life in order to limit the draw of urbanization, thereby keeping congregations and households intact. Use of the plough and production for specific markets did remake the household, but not usually in the precise ways missionaries expected. Christian men would try to find ways of reconciling mission expectations for a certain level of agricultural production with state policies governing land tenure and resource use. AMEC women would constantly confront both the new

mission ideals of domesticity and the household realities of intensified labor demands for agricultural production. The experiences and desires of these individuals combined with the messages of mission Christianity to produce a new 'way of looking at days' in colonial Zimbabwe.

APPENDIX A: ORAL SOURCES

Interviews conducted by: Todd H. Leedy and Abraham I. Frank
Transcription and translation by: G. Haba Musengezi

- T. Kuture, Nyadire mission, 30 January 1998
T. Makuvatsine, Nyadire mission, 30 January 1998
P. Nyamukapa, Nyadire mission, 30 January 1998
M. N'ona, Uzumba, 30 January 1998
- L. Gobvu and E. Musika, Nyakatsapa mission, 6 February 1998
E. Nhiwatiwa, Africa University, 6 February 1998
I. Makunike, Nyakatsapa mission, 7 February 1998
J. Nyakatsapa, Nyakatsapa mission, 7 February 1998
E. Nyambayo, Nyakatsapa mission, 7 February 1998
M. Murphree, University of Zimbabwe, 17 February 1998
W. Mutamba, University of Zimbabwe, 17 February 1998
E. Sisimayi, Nhediwa, 25 February 1998
M. Chambara, Mutambara mission, 27 February 1998
M. Mutambara, Mutambara, 28 February/20 April 1998
- A. Bomba, Charinga, 4 March 1998
D. Kanokanga, Murehwa, 4 March 1998
D. Kanyimo, Murehwa mission, 4 March 1998
E. Mukasa, Murehwa, 4 March 1998
T. Kambarani, Uzumba, 5 March 1998
N. Muswe, Uzumba, 5 March 1998
- I. and E. Chimboza, Arnoldine mission, 10 March 1998
M.R. Handreck, Arnoldine mission, 10 March 1998
M. Handreck, Arnoldine mission, 11 March 1998
S. Dzikiti, Arnoldine mission, 11 March 1998
V. Maforo, Arnoldine mission, 11 March 1998
S. Njambi, Arnoldine mission, 11 March 1998
S. Chikazhe, Murehwa, 12 March 1998
P. Mujuru, Murehwa, 12 March 1998
D. Manyarara, Nyadire mission, 13 March 1998
E.C. Makunike, Highlands, 17 March 1998
S. and E. Fusiri, Arnoldine mission, 31 March 1998

- L. Mawoyo, Old Mutare mission, 2 April 1998
- H. Nyazika, Old Mutare mission, 3 April 1998
- A. and C. Kawadza, Buffalo Bush farm, 4 April 1998
- E. Nemaungwe, Arnoldine mission, 9 April 1998
- J. Nhwatiwa, Old Mutare mission, 16 April 1998
- D. Kawadza, Dangamvura, 18 April 1998
- P. Musukutwa and Chinunzura, Nhedziwa, 20 April 1998
- N. Chigumira, Nyakatsapa mission, 22 April 1998
- J. Masevha, Nyakatsapa mission, 22 April 1998
- R. Jangano, Nyakatsapa mission, 23 April 1998
- E. Makunike, Nyakatsapa mission, 23 April 1998

APPENDIX B: MISSION FARM FEATURES[†]

	Nyakatsapa	Mutambara	Old Umtali	Nyadiri	Arnoldine
Source/date	Private 1911	BSAC 1909	BSAC 1902 Private 1903	Govt. 1924 Private 1954	BSAC 1917
District	Umtali	Melsetter	Umtali	Mrewa	Makoni
Total acres	4170	3665	2408	6025	2452
Arable acres	765	265	588	228	450
Irrigated acres	45	200*	93	2	0
Grazing acres	2400	1000	1000	3000	1500
Livestock	cattle (330) sheep poultry	cattle (50) pigs sheep	cattle (32) pigs	cattle (90) pigs sheep poultry	cattle (150)
Labor	2 full-time tenants (1 day/week)	10 full-time boarding students	21 full-time boarding students	9 full-time 2 part-time boarding students	N/A
Markets	Umtali (25mi) Penhalonga (15mi)	Umtali (50mi)	Umtali (11mi) Penhalonga (8mi)	Salisbury (70mi) Mtoko (15mi)	Headlands rail siding (15mi)
Tenants	80 signed leases 15 irregular	N/A	N/A	N/A	27 signed leases
School	primary	primary	primary secondary	primary secondary	primary
Medical	N/A	clinic	hospital	hospital	N/A

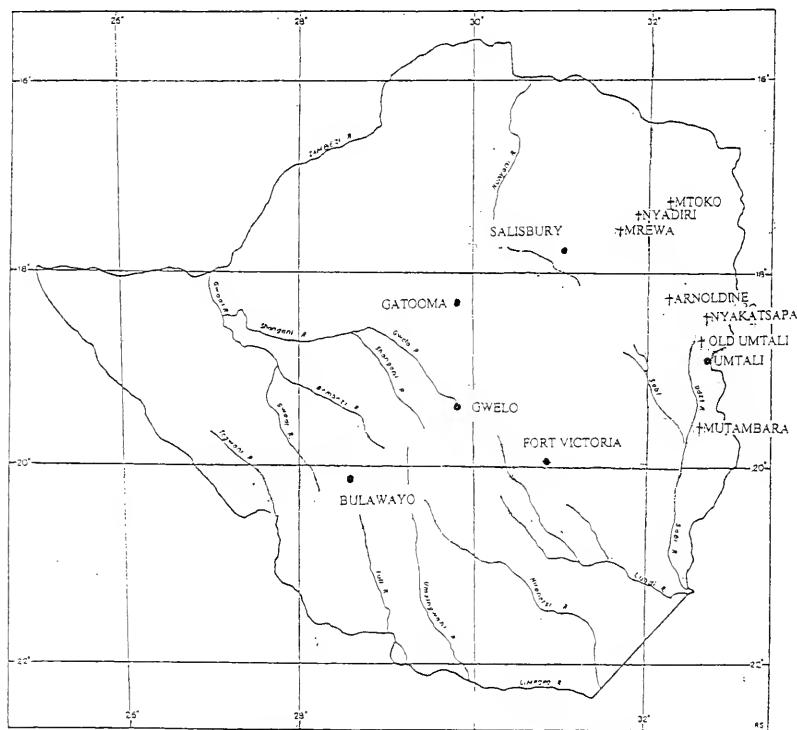
Source: Conference Agricultural Survey for Field Committee (August 1954).

* Mrewa mission statistics are omitted from this survey, apparently because the station grounds only comprised 105 acres. The mission utilized both school fields and student labor to produce food for its' boarding pupils.

* This figure only denotes potential irrigable area under official water grant.

APPENDIX C: MAP

AMEC Missions in Colonial Zimbabwe



Source: C. Zvobgo, A History of Christian Missions in Zimbabwe, 1996.

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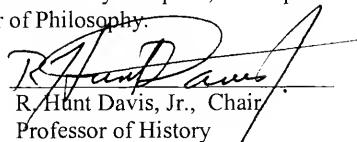
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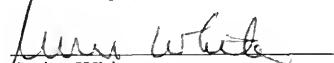
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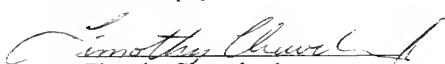
I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.


R. Hunt Davis, Jr., Chair
Professor of History

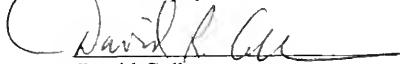
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Luise White
Associate Professor of History

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.


Timothy Cleaveland
Assistant Professor of History

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.


David Colburn
Professor of History

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.


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